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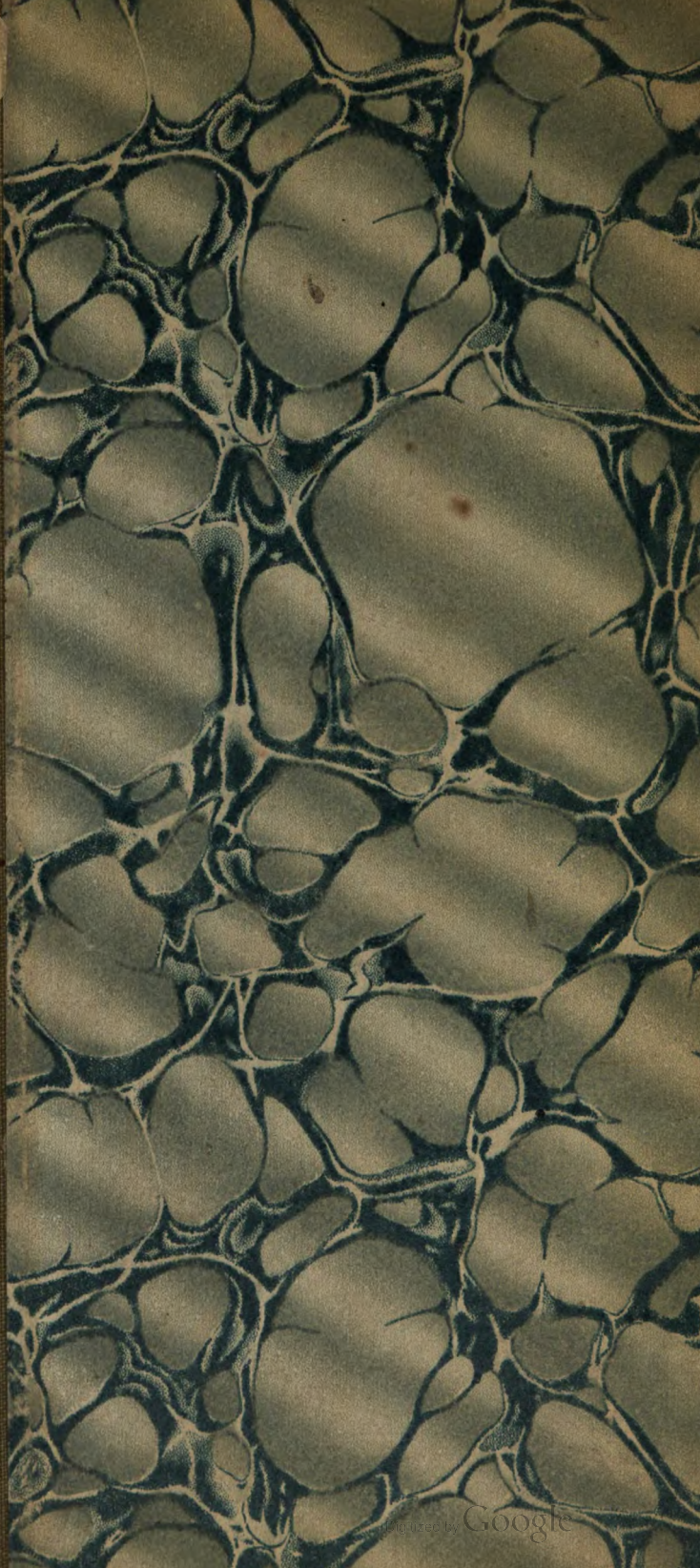
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# ALFRED THE GREAT;

OR,

THE PATRIOT KING:



A DRAMA,

IN FIVE ACTS.

AS PERFORMED WITH ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE AT THE  
THEATRE ROYAL DRURY LANE ON THE  
28TH APRIL, 1831.

BY J. S. KNOWLES, Esq.

AUTHOR OF VIRGINIUS, &c.

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1918

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

### *English.*

Elswith, Miss Huddard.  
Maude, Mrs. C. Jones.  
Alfred, Mr. Macready.  
Oddune, Mr. J. Vining.  
Oswith, Mr. H. Wallack.  
Edric, Mr. Younge.  
Egbert, Mr. Thompson.  
Kenric, Mr. Cooke.

Edwy, Mr. Sinclair.  
Oswald, Mr. Honner.  
Arthur, Mr. Eaton.  
Edgar, Mr. Bland.  
Edwin, Mr. Fenton.  
Conrad, Mr. Hammerton.  
Ethelred, Miss Swift.  
Arnold, Mr. Cathie.

### *Dances.*

Ina, Miss Phillips.  
Edith, Miss Faucit.  
Guthrum, Mr. Cooper.  
Amund, Mr. S. Jones.  
Oscar, Mr. C. Jones.

Haldane, Mr. Howard.  
Otho, Mr. Yarnold.  
Soldier, Mr. Howell.  
Priest, Mr. Dowsing.  
Boy, Master Fenton.



## PROLOGUE.

BY THOMAS ATKINSON.

---

To paint the manners, living as they rise ;  
To wing the folly as it soaring flies ;  
These have been deemed the Drama's fittest tasks :  
Yet, does the Drama either ? each one asks.  
—The moment's manners, like the rainbow's hue,  
Confusedly brilliant, are as fleeting too ;  
The shafts now aimed at folly seldom hit,  
Fledged from its feathers, but untipped with wit.  
Whatever is in Fashion, Art, or Science,  
With our self-love 'gainst satire makes alliance !  
These aim not at your Author,—his have been  
The *sympathetic* triumphs of the scene.  
When by a daughter's martyrdom made free,  
You saw a nation leap to liberty.  
And thought of Sydney's scaffold—Russell's wife—  
When Gracchus gave to Roman ire his life ;  
Felt in your hearts a Wallace' spirit swell,  
And knew your mountains have had many a Tell !  
—But now his muse alights on English ground,  
In England's annals has its story found :  
A worthier page Time's records may not show ;  
And now the hand that bade your bosoms glow  
With mutual ardour, in the lofty pride  
Of Freedom won—though by tyrannicide—  
Doth picture forth a still more noble thing  
Than patriot only—even a PATRIOT KING !—  
Such as we now in living lustre see,  
As WILLIAM wills each subject shall be FREE.  
Not in the measured pomp of sounding verse,  
Whose music's march moves like a monarch's hearse,  
Seeks he to do it. Life's a chequered scene,  
And its most vivid pictures such have been :  
So he hath courted music's 'witching aid ;—  
It soothed the Dane,—are you more rudely made ?  
And oh, forget not, 'mid the sterner throng  
Of Alfred's glories, he was child of song !—  
This is his case ;—his advocate's his theme ;  
And as your bosoms warm at Alfred's name,  
Be merciful in judgment, even while just—  
For Alfred gave the Jury's sacred trust !

*J. R. Thorne*

## ALFRED.

---

### ACT I.

---

#### SCENE FIRST.

---

#### *THE DANISH CAMP.*

---

*Enter EDITH, with a bow and quiver, followed by INA, attended by a Boy, who carries a bow and quiver.*

*Edith.* Come, let us see who'll hit the target first.

*Ina.* My bow hath got a cast, and will not shoot.

*Edith.* In sooth, your bow hath got no cast at all,—  
'Tis straight as mine—take mine—I'll shoot with it.

*Ina.* Yours fits me not,—'tis harder far to draw.

*Edith.* Try it.

*Ina.* No, no; I will not shoot to-day.  
Besides, my arrows all have lost the nock.

*Edith.* Here's store enough of mine.

*Ina.* Good Edith, no;  
Entreat me not—I will not shoot to-day.

*Edith.* Why, so 'twas yesterday; fie, Ina, fie!  
To tax thy bow with fault it never had.  
The bow that hath a cast is thy chang'd will,  
Thy nockless shafts are marr'd alone by that.

You wont to love this sport; from morn till night  
Your pastime 'twas, and now you love it not.  
What love you, sweet, instead?

*Ina.* What should I love?

*Edith.* Nay, Ina,—you alone can answer that.  
Has Otho's suit prevailed?

*Ina.* When did a flower  
Spring from a weed, that love should come of hate!

*Edith.* What! call you love a flower? A flower looks  
gay—

So looks not love! A flower is sweet—who says  
That love is sweet? Doth sweetness gather pain  
For them that own it? Rather love's a weed  
Oft taken for a flower—found out at last  
With a sigh!—O, Ina, you have pluck'd this weed!  
Come, own it, Ina!

*Ina.* Wherefore do you look  
Thus at me?

*Edith.* Why do you, my Ina, look  
At any thing but me? Why do your eyes  
Of late their lustre lavish on the ground  
That cares not for it?—and your honied breath  
That should be given to your silver tongue  
To make rich music of, why do you waste  
Oftener on thankless and contentless sighs?  
Come, tell me, Ina, what has happen'd to you?

*Ina.* Alas! I know not.

*Edith.* Do you say, Alas!  
O, then 'tis over with you! Why, you're in tears;  
Only the drop's but half-way out, that soon  
Would make way for the rest,—held not your eye  
Its crystal door upon it! Lean your head  
Upon the bosom of your friend, and give  
Your secret vent—for sure you have one, Ina?

*Ina.* Not I!—Come, take the bow!—I'll shoot with  
you!—



A TRAGEDY.

11

My quiver 'gainst a shaft, I'll be the first  
To hit the mark.—Set up the target, Boy!

[Exit Boy.]

Now for the eye of the eye.—In sooth I've missed  
Wide by a mile—but thou hast shot full home!  
I've pluck'd it, Edith, flower or weed.—If weed,  
A weed most like a flower.—O precious weed!  
There's not a flower so fair, I'd deem thee grac'd  
To call thee by its name!

*Boy, (running in.)*

**Boy.** The battle's won!

I see our troops come winding up the glen,  
Their spears and banners wreath'd,—a token sure  
Of victory!

[Exit.]

*Edith.* Let's meet them, Ina;—Come!

Why, sweet, what's this? How pale you turn! How  
damp's

Your little hand! Nay, now, 'tis snow indeed.  
Cold as 'tis white! Did you not rightly hear?  
He says the battle's won!

*Ina.* I know he does.

*Edith.* Is't with such cheeks you listen to such news?  
This would become the daughter of the foe.

*Ina.* The foe! The foe!

*Edith.* What! find'st thou something sweet  
In that harsh word, that thou repeat'st it thus?

*Ina.* Harsh word! now, thou art harsh to call it so.—  
Jars it thine ear? there's music in't to mine.—  
Stands it for what thoud'st shun? that's what I'd seek:  
Yea! 'fore the things that brother, sister, friend—  
Soft names—do stand for! When thoud'st name to Ina  
The thought most tender to her, use no word  
But that—that harsh, sweet word—more sweet, because  
'Tis harsh to all but her! She loves a foe!  
That foe hath lost the battle we have won.

*Edith.* Why, sweet, where saw'st thou this gentle foe?

*Ina.* Even here. When last the Saxon ask'd a truce,  
Curious to see their herald, I remain'd  
Behind you in my father's tent. He came!  
O, with what grace of richest manhood! Proud  
His gait, yet bearing onwards looks so bland  
As made all hearts give willing way to him.  
He spake, and I took root to where I stood,  
And so did all.—Not Guthrum mov'd.—O Edith!  
How should it be with Ina? Where were her eyes?  
What were her eyes about? What did her heart?  
Dost feel it throbbing now? 'Tis quiet now  
To what 'twas then! How often have you tried  
To fix your naked eye upon the sun,  
And when you've ta'en it off, how has the day,  
From gazing his bright face, been turn'd to night,—  
Flowers, verdure, darken'd; yea, the sky itself  
From shining blue, grown ink—so was't with me  
When sight of him was gone! Night turn'd to day  
Again with you—but light's gone out with Ina  
E'er since the day she look'd upon the foe!

*Edith.* Come hence, come hence awhile; your father's  
here,  
He must find looks of welcome—not such looks  
As these!

*Ina.* Have with you.—You have got my secret!

[*Exeunt.*]

*Enter GUTHRUM, AMUND, OSCAR, HALDANE, and  
Danes.*

*Guthrum.* Halt, comrades, halt! and change your  
toil for rest,  
And then from rest to feasting! We'll carouse  
A moon for this last victory, that leaves  
No future foe to front us. England's won:  
We shall not need to cross the main again

To prop us with fresh succours. Here we'll build  
 Another Danish kingdom, fairer far  
 Than what we've left. What, ho there! bring me wine.  
 I'm thirsty from the fray. Ho! wine, I say!  
 A seat!—Here, in the open air, we'll drink, *Sit me down.*  
 Or e'er we part, to our new Denmark.—Chief  
 And followers shall pledge me. Wine, I say!

*Enter OTHO.*

*Otho.* Guthrum, your Priests prepare a sacrifice  
 To Odin for our victory, and ask  
 If you will send them victims for the God.

*Guthrum.* Take them!—you know the God must  
 have his due!

Give him the wine! my thirst's gone off—yet, no;  
 'Tis fit that I drink first. (*Drinks.*) To our new Denmark!  
 By Odin! 'twas a glorious victory!  
 The God deserves his victims—he shall have them!  
 Odin's the God of War! If he drinks blood,  
 He has a right. Who dares deny the God  
 His victims? Give him them!

*Otho.* How many?

*Guthrum.* What

He asks! (*Exit Otho.*) Come, Amund, take the cup!  
 We fought

Like Danes to-day.—I saw you, Amund, cleave  
 In twain a Saxon at a single blow.

*Amund.* My Lord, 'twas slight to what your fal-  
 chion did,

That thro' the casqued head and mailed chine  
 Made way at one dire wheel!

*Guthrum.* Ay, did it so?

I do believe it did! No more of that.  
 Give me your hand, good Amund—for that blow  
 Lord of a gallant castle thou shalt be.  
 Pass on the cup to Oscar. Oscar! ha!



Show me thy falchion's edge.—Look, Amund, here—  
I saw him keep at once five Saxon swords  
At bay! Well done!—Oscar, be sure you sit  
On my right hand at banquet.

*Oscar.* Mighty Chief,  
Your eye I saw upon me, was a sword  
More than made up for all the odds you name.  
Besides, your arm just then had turn'd the fight  
That seem'd at first against us.

*Guthrum.* Was it so?  
I don't remember it. Good Oscar, ask  
What portion of the spoil thou wilt—'tis thine!

*OTHO, (entering.)*  
*Otho.* We have got the victims, Guthrum.

*Guthrum.* So! Enough!

*Otho.* Eight of them did we take by lot,—the ninth  
Is self-devoted to preserve the life  
Of one to whom we were about to hold  
The fatal urn.

*Guthrum.* Indeed! A Chief?

*Otho.* The port of both of them bespeaks them men  
Of that degree.

*Guthrum.* Have 'em before us. (*Exit Otho.*) Guth-  
rum

Loves war. He'd leave the banquet any time  
To mingle in the fight. He loves a friend;  
But more than friend's embrace, he loves the hug  
Foe gives to foe. Yet is not Guthrum cruel;  
His foe disarm'd he never yet could smite.  
He loves a noble deed, altho' the sword  
Achieves it not. How say you, friends, wer't right  
To save the man who loves his friend so well,  
He lays down life for him,—altho' a gift  
To Odin?

*Amund.* Ere the priest his sacred hand

Lays on the victim, it has still been lawful  
To snatch him from his doom!

*Haldane.* Behoves him tho'  
To swear eternal league with Odin's Sons.

*Guthrum.* He'll do it, Haldane! Ha! I saw thee  
matched

For once to-day. That Saxon found thee, Haldane,  
With two that back'd thee, livelier work than suits  
A sluggard's hand. Thy seconds both were down.  
Was't not so, Haldane? And thyself, methinks,  
Mad'st rather backward way, when I dispatched  
Fresh aid to thee, with charge at any risk  
To take thy gallant foe alive. 'Twas you,  
Oscar, that I so charged.

*Oscar.* My liege he lives.  
O'ercome by numbers, could not make him yield,  
But bore him down to earth, where, as he lay,  
The strife his fetter'd limbs were forc'd to drop,  
His eye continued still, that shot around  
Deadly defiance in the face of death;  
The while his hand, that yet his weapon clench'd,  
We, joint by joint, were forc'd to sever from  
Its more than steely hold.

*Guthrum.* Was't not the herald  
Last sent us from the English King?

*Oscar.* The same.

*Guthrum.* I'd like to see that man again!

*Oscar.* He's here.

*Enter OTHO, with OSWITH and EDRIC chain'd.*

*Guthrum.* This he! Men's looks reflect their deeds  
as well

As natures.—One of these is he whose thought  
Of lofty friendship overlooks himself,  
When fix'd on his friend's need—this is the man!

*Otho.* It is, my Lord.

*Guthrum.* Is he thy friend, whose life  
Thou count'st a thing so precious, thou dost give  
Thine own to purchase it?

*Oswith.* He is.

*Guthrum.* What rich  
And heavy debt hast thou incurr'd to him  
To pay so large return as takes thy all?

*Oswith.* And think'st thou friendship barter's kind-  
nesses?

'Tis not because that such or such a time  
He help'd my purse, or stood me thus or thus  
In stead, that I go bound for him, or take  
His quarrel up! With friends, all services  
Are ever gifts, enrich the donor most.  
Who reads them otherwise, doth only take  
The face of friend to mask a usurer.  
I give my life for him, not for the service  
He did me yesterday, or any day,  
But for the love I bear him every day,  
Nor ask if he returns!

*Guthrum.* Be Guthrum's friend.  
Thou livest, and thy friend for sake of thee.

*Edric.* O generous proffer!

*Oswith.* Would'st accept it?

*Edric.* Yes.

*Oswith.* Then do.

*Guthrum.* Remove their chains.

*Oswith.* First take off his.

*Guthrum.* Now, thine!

*Oswith.* Long as my country wears your chains,  
Guthrum, beware how you unrivet mine,  
For once you set my arm at liberty,  
The thing the first 'twill seek, will be a sword  
To strike her fetters off.

*Guthrum.* Saxon, beware! The smooth and gentle tide  
Of mercy thwarted, turns a torrent oft,



O'erwhelming as the raging flood itself  
Of vengeance.

*Oswith.* Here I stand—let it come down !  
I care not when or where its fury rushes !

*Enter INA and EDITH, (as yet unperceived.)*

*Ina.* (*Aside to Edith.*) 'Tis he !

*Guthrum.* Is Guthrum brav'd !—Is he the son  
Of Odin !—Marches in his van the God  
Of War !—Lies o'er the humbled neck of hosts  
Of prostrate foes his path ; and brooks he thus  
Defiance, and from one earth-sprung—the spawn  
Of the vile clod he treads on ? Stood thy king  
Where now thou stand'st, his regal eye had fallen  
Beneath the frown of Guthrum.

*Oswith.* Not beneath  
The frown of Guthrum's God, were Odin real  
As he is fabled !

*Guthrum.* Give him to the God !

*Ina.* Father ! *(Runs forward)*

*Guthrum.* My Ina !

*Oswith.* Ha ! Could I believe  
He was not born of earth—there were indeed  
An argument could make me.

*Guthrum.* I have given thee  
Thy choice of life or death—thou choosest death,  
'And take it.

*Ina.* Father ! *(clings to him)*

*Guthrum.* Ah, thou ever art  
My sweet, and welcome calm comes o'er me, sun-like,  
When summer days are breathless for the joy  
Of his enriching beam.—I'm smooth again !  
Not a ruffle ! not a ruffle ! Is he not gone ? Hence  
with him !

*Ina.* No, no, my father !

*Guthrum.* Would'st thou have me set

A-foam again!—Nay, Ina, if I rage  
'Tis not at thee!—Why start away from me?  
Come back and cling to me again!—Close—close!  
My child, beloved and only, tell me, if  
Thou canst, how much I love thee!

*Otho.* Saxon, come!

*Ina.* No, no!

*Guthrum.* How, Ina!

*Ina.* Thou did'st not repeat

Thy order.

*Guthrum.* But I will.

*Ina.* O, speak to me!—

I'm glad the fight is o'er.—You won it soon!  
You won it safely, else it were not won!  
How stood the plume I fastened on your crest?—  
Well! Well! How many eyes were on that plume,  
Tossing as high it rode the stormy wave  
Of battle, still the more majestic,  
The fiercer wax'd the swell!

*Guthrum.* My child! My child!

Aye, every inch my own. When thou was't born  
I wish'd a son—I would not give thee now  
For troops of them!—Otho.—

*Ina.* Your scarf!—Is't whole?

No, no, a rent is here—Come, take it off.  
False as it is, you shall not wear't again!  
I'll knit you another, every loop of which  
I'll fasten with a spell, that it shall prove  
An amulet against the thrust of spear,  
Or stroke of falchion!

*Guthrum.* So you shall! You make  
A child of your father!—Otho!—

*Ina.* Not a wound!

For ever in the thickest of the fight,  
And not a wound! Thank Odin! Yet I would  
There were a slight one—for the 'tending on't!

No! No! and yet in sooth I would there were!  
 I know not what I say! I prate! I prate!  
 Thank Odin, you are safe!—

*Guthrum.* My girl! My girl!

My idle girl! my foolish, loving child!

My Ina!—What! and have I won the fight,

And shall not thou become the richer for't.

By Odin, but thou shalt! Come, ask me something!

Name me some gift. Come, measure, if thou canst,

Thy father's love for thee! What will't thou ask?

Ask me a kingdom! Come!

*Ina.* No kingdom, father,

I'd ask of thee—only one little boon.

*Guthrum.* What is't? Speak out!

*Ina.* Is't granted?

*Guthrum.* Yes, by Odin!

Out with't—what is't? What little boon is this,

Which only wants the naming, to be thine,

And yet thou seem'st to lack the breath to name.

*Ina.* Is that a rivet of your armour broke?

No, no!

*Guthrum.* And if it were, no blame to it.

It turn'd an English javelin.—At my feet,

The weapon fell; I pick'd it up again,

And sent it hissing at its master's head.

*Soldier, (entering,)*

*Soldier.* This packet found we, Guthrum, in the tent  
 Of the king.

[*Guthrum takes the packet and reads.*]

*Oswith.* Such things I've heard of—magic forms  
 Enchantment raises, mocking fairest things  
 Of earth, but fairer, to entrance earth's sons—  
 Things they would rather deem of heaven, tho' found  
 On earth! which once beheld, their functions seize  
 With ravishment, that leaves them but the power



To gaze or listen, till no warning effort  
Of reason, or stronger will avails, to tear  
The charmed sense away!

*Edric.* Would I were chain'd  
Again! Her pity maketh freedom poor  
That can't awaken it.

*Guthrum.* (*Returning packet.*) It matters not.  
A string of Saxon rhymes.—Come, Ina, name  
The boon thoud'st ask.

*Ina.* When thou art happy, what  
Most wishest thou?

*Guthrum.* That happiness may last.

*Ina.* No, no! not that—Thou wishest others happy.

*Guthrum.* I do! I do!

*Ina.* And so do I.—When I  
Am happy, I'd have all things like me,—not  
That live and move alone, but even such  
As lack their faculties. Then could I weep,  
That flowers should smile without perception of  
The sweetness they discourse.—Yea, into rocks  
Would I infuse soft sense to fill them with  
The spirit of sweet joy, that every thing  
Should thrill as I do.—Then, were I a queen,  
I'd portion out my realms among my friends,  
Unstud my crown for strangers, and my coffers  
Empty in purchasing from foes their frowns,  
Till I had bought them out; that all should be  
One reign of smiles around me. I am happy  
To-day—to-day that brings thee back to me,  
The hundredth time, in triumph and in safety!  
This day that smiles so bounteous upon Ina,  
She'd wish to smile e'en upon Ina's foe.—  
Let not the Saxon die!

*Guthrum.* He lives!—My child!  
What makes thee gasp?

*Ina.* How near—how near to you

Was death to-day. 'Twas well for Ina that  
Your armour proved so true.—She had not else  
A father now to ask a boon of, and  
To get it soon as ask'd!

*Guthrum.* He lives thy slave!  
Had he been wise, he had been Guthrum's friend.

*Ina.* His chains—

*Guthrum.* 'Tis thine to take them off or not.  
What Guthrum gives, he gives! He is thy slave.  
Come, Saxon, thou art free!

[*Exeunt Guthrum and Chiefs.*]

*Edric.* Would I were chain'd  
Again!

[*Exit.*]

*Oswith.* I gaze, and with my tranced eyes  
Drink magic in.—I know it, still I gaze.  
And yet can bane reside in aught so sweet?  
Can poison lodge in that consummate flower,  
That blends the virtues of all blooming things,  
And with the wealth of its fair neighbourhood,  
Enriches very barrenness, that near it  
Grows sightly, e'en, and sweet?

*Ina.* How's this, my Edith?  
My wish obtain'd I tremble to enjoy;  
I need but speak the word and he is free;  
Yet, there I let him stand in shackles still,  
Whose chains to doff, were there no other way,  
I'd go in bonds myself.—Sweet, be my tongue,  
Bid them remove his chains!

*Edith.* Unbind him, there!

*Soldier.* My hand is useless from the fight to-day.

*Ina.* Try you.

*Edith.* (*Trying to take off his chains.*) It baffles me! It  
hath a knack  
I am not mistress of.—Will you not try!

[*Ina approaches, and takes off his chains.*  
You've done 't.—Why, what's the matter with you, Ina?

Hast put his fetters on, that here you stand  
As tho' bereft of motion. Rouse thee, Ina!

*Ina.* O for a minute, Edith, in thy bosom,  
'To weep there! Ay, to weep! To shed such tears  
As shower down smiling cheeks, when sudden joy  
Pours in to overfilling of the heart  
That look'd not for't, and knows not what to do  
With all its treasure!

*Oswith.* I do feel it still!  
Still do I feel the touch of her fair hand.  
How passing fair! The driven snow itself  
Might make as white a one, but then, again,  
As cold as that is glowing! Who will loose  
The fetters it puts on? or who that wears them  
Would sigh for the embrace of liberty!  
Truth! honour! all is 'laps'd.—O for a foe  
To taunt me now!—O for a flourish of  
The Danish trump—or would their banners come  
And flout me!

*Ina.* Saxon! Will you follow us?

*Oswith.* I come, sweet maid! What am I but your  
slave  
To follow—tho' I leave all else that's bright?

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

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SCENE FIRST.

---

A GOTHIC CHAMBER IN THE KING'S CASTLE.

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ELSWITH *discovered, with ETHELRED on her knee—  
BERTHA beside her.—Another Female Attendant at a  
distance.*

*Elswith.* Come, tell me, little Sir, if I shall see  
Thy father soon.—Come, tell me now! I'll take  
A smile for *ay*; and if thy lip should pout,  
It shall be *no*.—Come, is it *no*, or *ay*?  
Let it be *ay*.—Come, Sir, look up! A queen's  
Your suitor, and you answer for a king!  
See, Bertha!—Ah! you should have look'd before—  
He smil'd, tho' now he pouts. So, Sir, you play  
The soothsayer betimes—your prophecies  
Must needs come true, that promise good or ill!  
Take him away.—He's heavy—he would sleep.  
There, give him to his nurse. I've tir'd myself  
And him with pleasing him.—Out, Sir! you might  
Have smil'd to please your mother! Yet a kiss

Before you go.—There, we are friends again!  
Take him away, and do not quit his couch.

[*Exit Attendant with Child.*]

I know not wherefore, Bertha, but my heart  
Feels as if care had taken leave of it  
Never to meet it in this world again,—  
Methinks it never felt so light.

*Bertha.* You'll hear  
Good news!

*Elswith.* I look for it. Ah me!

*Bertha.* Why sigh'd  
You then, dear madam?

*Elswith.* I was thinking, Bertha,  
Should it not come.—How's this?—I vow to thee,  
My gentle girl, talking of my good spirits  
Has almost made me sad.—Pshaw! there! All's well  
Again! We'll have good news!

*Bertha.* I am sure we shall.

*Elswith.* We shall—we shall—my Bertha! Say  
they not  
That when mischance approaches us, the heart  
From strange presentiment feels heavy?

*Bertha.* Yes;  
I've heard it many a time.

*Elswith.* That it feels heavy—  
But never light?

*Bertha.* O, never light!

*Elswith.* It should  
Be so. 'Twere odd if it felt light—and yet  
I think I have heard that it feels sometimes light  
Before misfortune—very light—too light  
For any apparent reason—as mine feels—  
Not feels—but felt just now.—They are gone, my Bertha!  
All my good spirits, and have left my heart  
As heavy as a piece of lead.—Good child,  
What can you do to make it light again?



*Bertha.* I'll read some history or legend to you.

*Elswith.* So do ! So do !—A history—something from Our Saxon Chronicles.—There lies the book.

*[Bertha gets a book, and draws chairs for herself and the queen.—They sit down.]*

Since Monday week, ten days—one—two—ay, ten.

Ten? 'Tis eleven! Eleven days; yet no word!

Why was a woman made to sit at home

When danger is abroad? Home is no place

For her.—Home—anxious, cheerless home!

That watches till 'tis sick—to which the thing

It wishes most, comes with the slowest foot,—

And only then by halves,—last sees—last hears

What first concerneth it to see and hear.

What proper place at such a time for her,

Whose eye sees perils thick in vacancy,

And ear is ever most upon the start

When nothing stirs!

*Bertha.* What history shall I read?

*Elswith.* I quite forgot you, Bertha.—What you will. Whate'er you open at.—What is't?

*Bertha.* The fall  
Of Royal Edgar.

*Elswith.* Close the book; for now  
I think again, I would not have you read.  
You know sweet ballads, Bertha, which you sing  
So thrillingly, that hearing you, in sooth,  
I've thought that speech was but a mortal thing  
To melody; you so have mov'd my soul,  
As tho' some seraph's tongue discours'd to it  
Unutterable sweetness.—You shall sing  
Me one of them.—Let's see—There's one you sing,  
That hath a story in small compass in't,  
Told by a lady when her lord's away—  
For so the burden argues—to her maidens  
That round her ply their work.—Remember you?

*Bertha.* Ay, madam.—

*Elswith.* Sing me that.

*Bertha.* Nay, any thing  
To cheer you, madam.

*Bertha sings.*

A fair lady looks out from her lattice—but why  
Should tears bedim that lady's eye ?  
Below stands the knight that her favour wears,  
But he mounts not the turret to dry her tears.  
He springs on his charger—" Farewell!"—He is gone—  
And the lady is left in her turret alone—

Ply the distaff, my maids—ply the distaff—before  
It is spun he may happen to stand at the door.

There was never an eye than that lady's more bright;  
Why speeds then away her favour'd knight ?  
The couch which her white fingers border'd so fair,  
Were a far softer seat than the saddle of war !  
What's more tempting than love ? In the warrior's sight  
The battle of freedom he hastens to fight !

Ply the distaff, my maids—ply the distaff—before  
It is spun he may happen to stand at the door.

The lady looks out from her lattice—but now  
Her eye is as bright as her clear shining brow !  
And is sorrow so fleeting ? Love's tears—dry they fast ?  
The stronger is love, is't the less sure to last ?  
Whose arm round her waist finds her knight ? 'Tis his own !  
By the battle she wept for, the lady is won !

Ply the distaff, my maids—ply the distaff no more—  
Would you spin when already he stands at the door ?

*Elswith.* Alas ! the smile with effort care puts on  
But leaves it all the sadder ! Sure my heart  
Is past the taste of sweetness, when thy music  
Hath not a spell to charm it ! How's the sun ?

The world for a word of news. [*Trumpet without.*]

*Bertha.* You've wish'd, and see

'Tis come already—more than you wish'd for come!

*Elswith.* Most like—most like—more than I wish'd  
for!

*Bertha.* Madam,

I meant they'd bring you many words of news.

*Elswith.* So may the bird of omen think he sings,  
While the devoted ear that lists to him  
Hears its death warning.

CONRAD, (*entering with a letter.*)

Madam, from the king.

*Elswith.* Sure he is safe! Mischance would never choose  
Such look as his to send her errand by.  
I'll read—I'll read.—Another battle, *Bertha*,  
And to be fought just as he came away!  
I thought the Dane had made a treaty, not  
To draw the sword again?

*Conrad.* Madam, his oath  
Was hardly sworn ere broken.

*Elswith.* Ha! You're slow  
Of foot to be a herald. By the time  
You must have left, you should have greeted me  
Full a week sooner!

*Conrad.* I was forc'd to fetch  
A compass round about, to shun a troop  
Of roving Danes. By this time, doubtless, madam,  
The battle's lost or won.

*Bertha.* Why say you "lost  
Or won?" Why not say won? You may be sure  
'Tis won!

*Elswith.* 'Tis lost, my *Bertha*,—bid him leave us.

[*Bertha signs to Conrad, who retires.*]

I know the battle's lost.—I have no hope.—  
Fam as sure of it as he that saw it.—

I have made up my mind to it.—See, Bertha,  
 I am past tears, as much as if my heart  
 Were turn'd to marble.—'Tis prophetic.—'Tis  
 Despair that is before hand with misfortune,  
 Ready to tell her ere she speaks—"All's known!"  
 The king!—The king!— [Bursts into tears.

*Bertha.* Ah, my blood runs again!  
 Just now you froze it.

*Elswith.* Would my own were frozen,  
 Never to run again—the king is dead!  
 Alfred is fallen.—My king—my husband's fallen.

[Alarm sounded.

Hark! Bertha—that's the sound of tumult.

[After a pause, footsteps are heard.—A Saxon  
 Soldier rushes in bleeding, followed by others.

*Soldier.* Fly!  
 Fly! Madam, fly! The battle's lost—I've liv'd  
 To save my queen!

*Elswith.* The king? [Soldier falls.

*Bertha.* He swoons! [They bear him off.

*Elswith.* I am answer'd.

His muteness passeth speech—out-talks it—leaves it  
 Without a word to brag of.

*Bertha.* Said he not  
 • That you should fly! The Dane's at hand!

CONRAD, (*without.*)

Arm! Arm!

*Bertha.* That shout announces him.—Do you hear  
 it, madam?

Fly! Fly! my queen, for your dear honour's sake!  
 Disguise yourself and fly! Train'd to these chances,  
 I've learn'd the cunning to dissemble so  
 My sex, that not my father's eye could know me.  
 I'll do the same for you. Your woman's shape  
 Transform to man's; alike your face—your smooth •

And sunny tresses, to dark tangl'd locks  
 Convert: and your white skin to berry brown,  
 That you shall look a wood-boy, rude as e'er  
 Took up his quarters with the weather—sun,  
 Or rain, or wrinkling frost.

*[Shouts and confusion, with clashing swords without.]*

CONRAD, (*entering.*)

We are beset!  
 The outward wall's surmounted.—Save the queen!  
 Haste to the secret passage which connects  
 The castle with the glen.

*Elswith.* My child! My boy!

*Bertha.* He's in the eastern tower.

*Conrad.* (*Stopping the queen.*) The eastern tower's  
 Cut off.

*Elswith.* (*Endeavouring to pass.*) Cut off from me!

*Conrad.* On my knees, madam,

I pray you rush not upon sure destruction.  
 Your faithful vassals of their bodies make  
 A rampart to defend the passage hither,  
 And give you time for flight.

*Elswith.* Do you talk to a mother!—

Way, Sir! [*Passes Conrad—tumult nearer.*]

*Conrad.* (*Catching hold of her robe.*) See, madam, see!

*Elswith.* I can see nothing  
 That keeps me from my child!

*Conrad.* (*To Bertha.*) Then must we do  
 Our duty.

*[Conrad and Bertha endeavour to force the queen away.]*

*Elswith.* Ha! Unhand me!—Treason!—Hold,  
 On your allegiance.—Have you nature in you!  
 You're Danes to tear a mother from her child!  
 I am your queen,—the consort of your king,  
 Whose frown would strike you dead!—Hold off, I say!  
 I'm a poor mother!—I'll kneel to you for my boy!—

I'll give you diadem and all for him !  
Do you hear him cry for me? You would do murder !  
You've hands for any thing ! My child ! My child !—  
[*She is borne off.*]

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SCENE SECOND.

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A FOREST.—NIGHT.

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*Enter ALFRED, moving with difficulty.—After proceeding two or three steps, he leans against the trunk of a tree.*

*Alfred.* From tree to tree I drag my weary limbs,  
As tho' each other step would be my last ;  
Yet whither they do bear me know I not.  
Why did I leave the plain and open track  
To be bewilder'd here? Better the Dane  
Than famine !—Come, I'll on.—This ample cloak  
Assists me not.—Its rich embroidery  
And costly texture weigh me down ! Off ! Off !  
Cumbersome greatness.—Go and aggrandize  
Some needy hind who reckons it the curse  
Of lowliness that it goes light.—There—go—  
Go with my kingdom ! (*Throws it away.*) Would I  
could throw off  
As readily the stiffness of my limbs  
And galling of my feet.  
[*Crosses to the other side with difficulty.*]  
How's this? My brain  
Begins to swim. [*Leans against a tree.*]



Sick! Sick! 'Tis hunger.—Not  
 Since early dawn 'till now, hath bread or water  
 Enter'd my lips! I'm deadly sick.—Alone,  
 And in this solitary place, with night  
 Around me! I must drag me on!—I cannot!  
 I cannot!—I've no more the power to quit  
 This spot, than if it were my grave! My queen  
 And child!—My only hope is there!—there!—there!—

EDWIN, (*without.*)

*Foal* Why, Maude!—Hoa!—Holloa!

*Alfred.* Never did it fail  
 The man that trusted in't.

EDWIN, (*without, but nearer.*)

What, Maude, I say!

*Alfred.* Hoa, friend!

EDWIN, (*entering.*)

Who's there?

*Alfred.* Help! Help!

*Edwin.* Ha! Who art thou?

*Alfred.* A soldier.

*Edwin.* And what wants't thou?

*Alfred.* Food and shelter.

*Edwin.* Come this way, then.

*Alfred.* I cannot move without  
 Thy aid.

*Edwin.* Lean on me! Come! A foolish dame  
 That calls me husband, and the foe has scar'd,  
 I was in search of, when I heard thee. Come.  
 She's safe enough—too safe for me to find!  
 Hoa! Maude, I say! Come on!—Why, Maude!  
 Come on!

[*Exeunt Alfred and Edwin—the latter calling  
 out at intervals.*]

EDWARD, (*without, on the other side.*)

Hollo!

EDMUND, (*still without.*)

Keep to the right! Follow the stream! Take time!

[*Enters.*]

We are now in safety!

EDWARD, (*entering, and treading on Alfred's cloak.*)

Ha! What have we here? [*Picking it up.*]

A cloak, and by the feel belonging to

Some man of high condition.—'Twere a prize

In better times.

*Edmund.* Nay, keep it; better times

May come. We are now beyond pursuit.

*Edward.* We are.

Would our poor comrades were as safe. The Dane

No quarter shows!—Alas, our prince and queen!

*Edmund.* We did our best to save them,—well for us

Their numbers bore us down,—we had not else

Been here.

[*The atmosphere becomes slightly illuminated.*]

*Edward.* Look up!—Look up!—That fiery spot

I' the midst of the black heavens—dost see it thro'

The opening of the trees? What kindles up

The welkin thus?

*Edmund.* The castle's fired!

*Edward.* No doubt

'Tis that! Come on! I know the neat-herd's cot

Lies somewhere hereabouts. We'll find it soon,

And there get shelter for the night—You're right—

See how it flames away!—Come on! Come on!

[*Exeunt.*]

## SCENE THIRD.

## THE INSIDE OF EDWIN'S HUT.

ALFRED and EDWIN.—*The former seated at a table with some bread and a drinking vessel before him: the latter standing.*

*Edwin.* How feel you now?

*Alfred.* As one that hath escap'd  
With a rich gem he fear'd he should be stripp'd of.

*Edwin.* Nay, give not over yet—altho' the fare  
I guess is poor to what the board provides  
You're wont to sit at.

*Alfred.* Rich!—Was never meat  
Serv'd up at banquet with its seasoning.—  
'Tis hunger makes a feast! No spicery  
Like that of its rare dish! All else is tasteless!  
Plain dressing, which the sated palate heeds not!

*Edwin.* How long were you bewilder'd in the forest?

*Alfred.* Since yesternight.

*Edwin.* So, we have lost the day?

*Alfred.* We have.

*Edwin.* And do you think the country's lost?

*Alfred.* Not lost.

*Edwin.* You say her bands are all dispers'd?

*Alfred.* They may collect again.

*Edwin.* The king, you say,  
Surviv'd the battle?

*Alfred.* Yes.

*Edwin.* (*After a pause.*) The country lives  
If the king lives! The people love the king.  
The present panic o'er, his banner yet  
Would rally them! Believe you he is safe?

*Alfred.* I hope he is.

*Edwin.* No Saxon but hopes that.

*Alfred.* Of this be sure—the storm that sweeps the  
land

Blows not aloof from him; nor long as e'er  
The meanest head's expos'd, will he remain  
Content with shelter!

*Edwin.* Happy were the head  
That by its self exposing shelter'd him.

*Alfred.* You love the king?

*Edwin.* Who does not love the king?  
You're sure he left the field with life?

*Alfred.* He did.

*Edwin.* Unhurt?

*Alfred.* Unhurt.

*Edwin.* Thank heaven!—Did many men  
Of note escape along with him?

*Alfred.* There did.

*Edwin.* He's guarded then?

*Alfred.* No!

*Edwin.* No! How's that?

*Alfred.* They were commanded from him.

*Edwin.* They were traitors  
That did obey.

*Alfred.* Would'st have them disobey  
The king?

*Edwin.* For the king's sake.

*Alfred.* For the king's sake,  
They left him.—

*Edwin.* How?

*Alfred.* To speed them to their holds,

And ward them for the king, till he should find  
As many backers as would warrant him  
To take the field again.

*Edwin.* He wanders then,  
Perhaps alone.—Perhaps no better furnish'd  
Than thou hast been.—No charger to assist  
His flight.—No larder to supply him food.  
The leafy penthouse of the forest tree  
Perhaps his roof at night,—its knotted root  
His pillow—or, at best, he lodges in  
Some sorry shed like this that shelters thee;  
With such another pallet as hard need  
Will make thee bare to stretch thy limbs upon!

*Alfred.* Even so.

*Edwin.* Even so? Why, hast thou e'er shed tears  
To say it with dry eyes, while mine do rain  
That only echo thee? Would I could find  
My king!

*Alfred.* He's nearer than thou think'st.

*Edwin.* How!—What!—

*Alfred.* He grasps thee by the hand, and thanks  
thee for

His life.

*Edwin. (Kneeling.)* My king! My king! Sure pro-  
vidence

With its own hand has led thee to my hut.  
I am thy neat-herd, tho' thou know'st me not.  
Thou art my master, well as king, altho'  
Before this hour I ne'er set eyes on thee!

*Alfred. (Rising.)* So near my castle! Show me to it.

*Edwin. (Rising and stopping the king.)* Not  
To-night.

*Alfred.* Why not?

*Edwin. (With great earnestness.)* Delay 'till morning!  
Not

To-night for any cause! 'Twill be a storm—

The wind is rising—and as we came in  
I felt a thunder drop.

*[The atmosphere and forest are seen at intervals  
illuminated through the casement.]*

*Alfred.* What fire is that?

*Edwin.* It lightens.

*Alfred.* Lightens! Did you hear  
The thunder then? I heard no thunder! That's  
The fire of earth, not heaven.—Heaven only talks of it  
With its looks the while it keepeth horrible silence!—  
My castle's fir'd!

*Edwin.* I swear it is a storm!  
Such wind and rain do ever come with thunder.  
'Tis nothing but the lightning that you see—  
Whose flashes follow in so quick succession,  
They seem one fitful flame.

*Alfred.* Old man! Old man! .  
As thou dost fear the hand of him that thunders,  
Answer me! Has the Dane beset my castle?

*Edwin.* I know not that he has.

*Alfred.* Thou know'st it not?  
Now, is this mercy? Wast thou sure to die—  
The bow prepar'd to shoot—how would'st thou like  
To stand thus long with eye upon the arrow,  
Drawn to the head and pointed at thy heart,—  
Yet hanging in the string?—Let fly at once!

EDWARD, (*without.*)

Hoa! Edwin! Nay, the door is on the latch,  
We'll e'en make bold to enter. (*Entering.*) These  
are times

Men may make free.

*Edmund.* Ha, Edward! See—look here.—

*Edward.* As I do live, 'tis the king's mantle.—None  
May wear this colour save the king.—He's slain!



*Edmund.* Well—better for him that his eyes were  
    clos'd,  
Than they should see that light!

*Alfred.* Why so?

*Edmund.* What is't  
To thee, good friend?

*Alfred.* The bursting of a vein—  
The snapping of a heart-string—any thing!  
News which I know as well as thou, yet so  
Do wonder at I like to hear it told.  
Relate it—out with it—tell it in a breath—  
I'm wild for't—wild!—

*Edwin.* They know him not.—Thy comrade  
Is wilful, Edward.—Tell us what he means.

*Edward.* The castle of the king has been surpris'd.  
Its warders slaughter'd, all but what you see,  
And o'er his queen and child its ruins blaze!

*Alfred.* (*To Edwin.*) Alone. (*Edwin takes out the  
others.*) Alone?—I am enough alone!

[*Throws himself upon the ground.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

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SCENE FIRST.

---

*A DEEP ROMANTIC GLEN.—ROCKS OVERHUNG  
WITH TREES.—A WATERFALL.*

---

*Enter BERTHA, disguised as a peasant boy. She sings.*

## SONG.

Gentle spirit of the strain!  
Might I paint thy dwelling-place,  
In the solitary glen  
Thy sequester'd grot I'd trace,  
Where the tuneful waterfall  
Warbles in its rocky hall;  
Cliffs amid with thickets hung,  
Vocal all from nature's song!

*ELSWITH, coming forward, and also disguised.*

How soft the rock with flinty tongue can speak,  
Being softly lesson'd!—'Tis a flatterer  
That still chimes in, whatever be the strain;  
Its tongue is servant to a hollow heart,  
Like his that never passion of its own

Doth seem to lodge, but's ever of the mood  
 Of them it humour's!—Nay, I wrong thee, girl,—  
 It is no flatterer.—Its looks are too  
 Uncouth for one.—'Tis nature's savage child,  
 Thou melt'st with sweetness, while it knoweth not  
 The excellence that's in't.

*Bertha.* It glads me, madam,  
 To hear those cheerful words!—the heart that sports  
 With thoughts like these, and clothes them too in sounds  
 So light, can never be the heavy one  
 That counts itself past hope!

*Elswith.* Past hope!—Oh no!—  
 On the other side of that. Did not the serf  
 Take Heaven to witness 'twas my child he saw,  
 Alive and scathless, in the rover's hands.  
 And for thy king, can'st count the tongues have vouch'd  
 He left the field with life,—yea, lives, some day,  
 And that no distant one, to right the land.  
 Past hope!—Oh no!—If any thing, my heart's  
 Too full of that;—for still when I expect  
 Our trusty Conrad back, I tremble with  
 A blissful fear that he may bring with him  
 Tidings of such o'erpowering joy as oft,  
 They say, hath killed the heart in blessing it.

*Bertha.* 'Tis past the time he should return. (*Looks out.*) He comes!  
 And comes with looks that should belong to one  
 Who brings no ordinary errand.

*Elswith.* Girl!  
 You've ta'en away my breath.—Out on thee!—No,  
 He brings no errand!—Yet, in sooth, he does.  
 I see it—yea—I hear it ere he speaks.

*Enter CONRAD, hastily and agitated.*  
 You've news for me!—He lacks the breath to tell it!—  
 Tears must be near those eyes!—He trembles too!

Joy trembles, ay, as fear!—It hath been seen  
To weep a hundred times. In 'ts extacy  
It hath drunk up at a draught the blood, and left  
The cheek as pale as death had frosted it!  
It is for joy you tremble—and he that trembles  
For joy, must surely have enough of it;  
And if that joy be for another's gain,  
What will the real, o'erbless'd owner do,  
To carry the rich freight!—You've seen the king?—

*Conrad.* Even so!

*Elswith* Ah!—Ah!—Don't touch me—speak not—  
move not.

*[After a convulsive struggle, she bursts into tears.]*

There!

I am well now!—well!—well!—O, how well!—most  
well!

O blessed tears—go show yourselves to grief,  
And ask it if it knows you. Happiness  
Was never yet the mother of a smile,  
If smiles are not your brothers—ay, for all  
Their gaudy coats! Where saw you him?

*Conrad.* You know

The neat-herd's cot, we thought the foe had burn'd?  
Still pushing on in quest of game, and not  
My quiver by a single arrow lighter,  
Before I thought upon't, I lighted on it;  
And found it safe as ever, seated in  
The tufted dell, no doubt had screen'd it from  
The spoiler.

*Elswith.* Was it there?—Come!—Come!—Alas,  
He will command me from him!—Spoke you to him?

*Conrad.* No!

*Elswith.* You did right! He ne'er would suffer me  
To share one peril with him; could I hope  
To be his partner in a thousand?—Ha!—  
Don't you remember looking in the brook

One day, I cried to thee—"My foster brother."  
 You know how like he is to me.—Come!—Come!  
 Thou must be wifeless still, my Alfred, that  
 Thy queen may not be husbandless. I'll tell you  
 As we go along!—Mind, Bertha, thou'rt my brother!  
 Thou shalt commend me, Conrad, to my lord  
 To fill a page's place!—Come on!—Come on!  
 Ah!—should'st thou have mistaken—it must not be!  
 I will not think it.—I will drink of joy.  
 That is so sweet, whate'er's to follow!—Death  
 If there's deceit within the tempting cup!

[*Exeunt.*]

## SCENE SECOND.

### THE INSIDE OF THE HUT.

ALFRED *discovered shaping a bow, with some unfinished arrows beside him.*—Enter MAUDE.

*Maude. (Aside.)* Ay!—there he's at his work; if work is that  
 Which spareth toil. He'll trim a shaft, or shape  
 A bow with any archer in the land;  
 But neither can he plough nor sow!—I doubt  
 If he can dig—I am sure he cannot reap.  
 He has hands and arms, but not the use of them!  
 I marvel if he has a tongue, he makes  
 So little profit on't. Would he but talk  
 I'd be content! [*Proceeds to lay a napkin on the table.*]

*Alfred. (Aside.)* He chastens whom he loves.  
 Yes, there's at once our solace and our hope !  
 Or, where's our faith, who read in martyrs' pains  
 The lives of saints ?—Scoffs and anathemas ;  
 Bonds, scourgings, exiles ; death by sword and cross ;  
 Trials that, in comparison, pronounce  
 The straits and sufferings of common men,  
 No more than flaws of weather, on a smooth  
 And level road, mark'd out their rugged path  
 That led direct to Heaven !

*Maude.* Can I believe  
 My eyes ?—He smiles !—I'm sure he does !—Of late  
 He seems no more the melancholy man  
 He was.—In sooth, a very likely man—  
 Well siz'd and favour'd—Ay !—No sorry match  
 For some good yeoman's daughter—but he'd need  
 Learn other handicraft.

*[Puts trenchers on the table, and afterwards a  
 cake and a vessel for drink.]*

*Alfred.* Adversity's  
 The nurse for kings ;—but then the palace gates  
 Are shut against her !—they would then have hearts  
 Of mercy oft'ner—gems not always dropp'd  
 In fortune's golden cup. What thought hath he  
 How hunger warpeth honesty, whose meal  
 Near lagg'd behind the hour ? Can he perceive  
 How nakedness converts the kindly milk  
 Of nature into ice, to whom each change  
 Of season, yea, each shifting of the wind  
 Presents his fitted suit ? What knows he of  
 The storm that makes the valiant quail, who ne'er  
 Hears it but thro' the wall, its voice alone  
 Can pierce ; and there talks comfort to him, with  
 The very breath that dost discourse despair  
 To the poor wretch who braves it ? He looks out,  
 Perhaps, and sees the mountain waves, and smiles,

So high they roll!—while on their brother hangs  
 The fainting seaman looking down at death  
 In the deep trough below!—I'll try and make  
 Me riches out of penury, and coin  
 From sufferings, blessings, that I may ascend  
 Again the seat of sovereign sway, so much  
 The more a king, as I'm the more a man!

*Maude.* And now to tell him dinner's laid.—In sooth,  
 I've come good speed to entertain a guest  
 I may not speak to, save to call him to  
 His trencher!—Nay, nor then sit down with him!  
 Well!—Well!—'Tis Edwin's humour—or his own.  
 For me, I'd eat my dinner without salt,  
 Rather than eat alone—if but to talk.—  
 Your dinner's ready. *[Alfred lays aside his bow.]*

Did he hear me now?  
 And if he did, he might have shown it—said  
 “I thank you, dame!” or, “Dame, you're very good.”  
 No mighty matter had it been, indeed,  
 Tho' he had said, “kind dame!”—or, “gentle dame!”  
 He heard me *not*. Your dinner's ready, friend!

*[Alfred rises and approaches the table.]*

Did I the niggard with his trencher play  
 As he does with his tongue, I warrant me  
 He'd speak!—I'll leave him to himself—I will—  
 Till dinner-time to-morrow! *[Going.]*

*Alfred.* Worthy hostess!—

*Maude.* *(Returning and running up to him.)* Your pleasure, friend?

*Alfred.* I trouble you too much.

*Maude.* Not half enough: I would your fare were better.

*Alfred.* 'Tis very good—and you are good, kind dame,  
 To give't so freely. I have been, I fear,  
 A churlish guest to you.

*Maude.* Nay, any thing



But that! I should not wonder turn'd he out  
 A very proper man! He must not know,  
 Should Edwin come with empty shoulders home,  
 'Tis his last dinner that he eats. (*Knocking.*) Who's  
 there?

Come in!—Come in!

*Enter a Man, half famished.*

What want you?

*Man.* Food!

*Maude.* Want calls on want, when you look here for  
 food!

*Man.* Good dame, to say I have not tasted food  
 Since morning yesterday, is not to speak  
 My need more urgent than it is.

*Maude.* Whate'er's

Thy need, we cannot minister to it—  
 Seek richer quarters.

*Alfred.* Stay!—He's in the gripe  
 Of straitest want. Here's food, and give it him!

*Maude.* That cake's the last but one we've in the  
 house!

*Alfred.* We breakfasted this morning; yesternight  
 We supped, and noon ere then had seen us dine.  
 No single meal we've lack'd at eating time,  
 And thrice hath eating time pass'd by with him  
 Without one! Whosoever wants a meal,  
 'Tis now *his* turn to eat. (*Breaks the cake.*) This por-  
 tion's mine.

Here!—Here!—Good dame, the hand that gave us this  
 Will not more sparing of its bounty be  
 For using thus its gift! The hand that fed  
 So many thousands with what only seem'd  
 Provision for a few, can also make  
 The remnant answer us for many a meal!

*Man.* O strong in faith!—In mercy rich!—Whoe'er

Thou art, that hand is with thee!—Wast thou great,  
 And art thou now brought low?—'Twill make thy fall  
 Thy rise—thy want abundance—thy endurings  
 Enjoyings—and thy desolation, troops  
 Of friends and lovers countless! Is the hour  
 Gone by, and is the day not glowing yet?  
 It shall the brighter shine, breaking upon thee  
 As with the radiance of a double sun  
 And light thee cloudless through! [Exit.

*Maude.* A poor man's wish.

They say is better than a rich man's gift.  
 If house and lands thou'st lost, I would not say  
 But thou may'st get them back again, with roof  
 Repair'd, and acres grown:—Yet lands and house  
 To come, are not so good as bread in hand,  
 And that thou'st given away, if Edwin speeds  
 No better than he did yesterday!

*Alfred.* Ne'er fear—

A bow and shaft shall cater for us yet.  
 These arrows when I've trimm'd, and strung this bow,  
 I'll find thee out a garner in these wilds  
 Shall dress the table still!

*Maude.* I'd rather trust  
 A peck of barley meal to furnish it!

EDWIN, (*without.*)

What, ho! Within!

*Maude.* 'Tis Edwin's voice!

EDWIN, (*without.*)

Within!

Open the door!

*Maude.* Thank providence, his hands  
 Have something else to do!— [Opens the door.

EDWIN, (*entering with a sack.*)

Provision, wife!

A month's subsistence!—Take it in, and ply  
 Thy housewifery; for, friends must eat of it—  
 Guests sure of welcome that supply the board  
 They ask their hosts to spread. (*Exit Maude.*) A  
 troop, my liege,

Of countrymen, for common safety link'd,  
 And wand'ring thro' the land, with' hopes, they say,  
 To learn some tidings of their king; and if  
 They find him, list themselves beneath his banner,  
 And face the Dane again!

*Alfred.* The land's not lost  
 That's left a son to struggle for't.—The king  
 Hath yet his throne that's firmly seated in  
 His people's hearts.

*Edwin.* They're here.

*Alfred.* Admit them!—Heed  
 Not me.

*Edwin.* (*Going to the door.*) In! In!

*Enter* EGBERT, KENRICK, ARTHUR, EDWY, *and Others,*  
*variously armed.*

*Egbert.* We thank you, friend.

*Edwin.* No thanks!

You're guests the frugal'st host might entertain,  
 Who cater for yourselves.—Sit down!—The board  
 Shall soon be cover'd.

*Egbert.* And we have a cup  
 To cheer it with, with richer beverage  
 Than what the fountain yields, replenish'd.—Bring  
 A flaggon, worthy host, we'll fill it till  
 The brim calls out "no more!"

*Kenrick.* (*Aside to Arthur.*) Command him to  
 A cover'd board and brimming cup!—He's fit  
 To play the leader there;—but he's no head  
 For men like us, that rise betimes from meat,  
 And wish for busy hands.—I'm weary on't!

*Arthur.* (*Aside to Kenrick.*) And so am I!—and, trust me, of our minds

Are many more.

*Kenrick.* To lead a life of shifts,  
That we may dine in safety!—I'll no more on't!  
Give me a skirmish?

*Arthur.* Tell him so.

*Kenrick.* I will,  
Ere I touch food again. [*Returns with Arthur.*

*Egbert.* (*To Alfred.*) Is it a bow  
You shape?

*Alfred.* It is.

*Egbert.* I pray you show't me.

*Alfred.* (*Rising and coming forward.*) Here.—

*Egbert.* (*Struck with the appearance of Alfred.*) Forgive me!—I did wrong, to call you from

Your seat.

*Alfred.* No wrong is done where none is meant.

*Egbert.* I feel't the more from your excusing it.  
Lodge you beneath this roof?

*Alfred.* I do.—

*Egbert.* (*Aside.*) I've met  
With men whose faces utter histories,  
That seeing them I could tell their course of life—  
Whether on ocean or on land—uneven  
Or smooth—almost what perils they had run,  
Or incidents of happy fortune seen.—  
Now his is one of them; but such a one—  
What it relates, do I interpret right,  
I'd say 'twould pass for marvel to the lives  
Of common men!

*Alfred.* You wish'd to see the bow.—

*Egbert.* (*Mechanically taking, and almost at the same time returning it.*) Your pardon.

[*Alfred returns to his seat.*

*Enter MAUDE with cakes, which she lays on the table, while one of Egbert's party enters with a flaggon, and sets it down.*

*Maude.* This bread will serve till more is ready,  
friends. *[Exit.*

*Egbert.* Sit down.

*Kenrick.* Sit down who will, I'll not sit down !

*Arthur.* Nor I.

*Oswald.* Nor I.

*Egbert.* Why?—What's amiss ?

*Kenrick.* We loathe

To lead this weary life. The very deer  
Do find the covert irksome, and at times  
Betake them to the plain.

*Egbert.* Not when they know

The hunters are abroad !—Sit down !—Sit down !

*Kenrick.* We'll not sit down, till 'tis determin'd who  
Shall head the table.

*Egbert.* I shall head it.

*Kenrick.* Ay ?

*Edwy.* And wherefore should he not ?

*Kenrick.* Go to !—Go to !—

You question far too bold for one so young.

*Edwy.* I question in the right, and so am bold  
Far less than thou that question'st in the wrong.

*Kenrick.* The wrong?—Thou'rt but a boy !

*Edwy.* The boy that proves  
Himself a man, does all a man can do.

*Kenrick.* Beware thou dost not prove thyself on me,  
My metal's temper'd,—thine at best's but raw.  
Before thy chin exchange'd its coat of down  
For one of manlier fashion, I had shown  
A beard in twenty fields.

*Egbert.* No more of this !  
The post by lot is mine. I got it not

Of mine own choice; nor yet by partial leave!  
 It fell to me. It might have fallen to you,  
 To him, or him—to any one—and then—  
 No matter! If by fearing to be rash  
 And overshoot the mark, my shaft hath lit  
 O'ershort on't, I am content a better bow  
 Should lead the game.

*Edwy.* It shall not be!—We'll have  
 No other leader!—Sides, Sirs, sides!

*Kenrick.* Come on!

When they've such stomach for't, 'twere strange if we  
 Lack'd appetite. Come on!

*Alfred.* (*Rushing in between them, as they are on the  
 point of encountering.*) Hold!—Stop!—Which  
 side's

The Dane? I stand for England!—Can it be  
 You're Saxons all! What? Are your foes so few  
 You make one's of each other?—Fie, Sirs!—Fie!

*Arthur.* (*To Kenrick.*) Who's he?

*Kenrick.* I know not.

*Alfred.* (*To Kenrick.*) You're a soldier?

*Kenrick.* Yes.

*Alfred.* Whose sword is that you draw?

*Kenrick.* My own.

*Alfred.* Your country's!

You took it with an oath to use it 'gainst  
 Her foes, and do you turn it on her sons?  
 For shame!

*Arthur.* Why bear you his rebuke?

*Alfred.* (*To Arthur.*) And you?

*Arthur.* A soldier too.

*Alfred.* (*To Oswald.*) And you?

*Oswald.* The same.

*Alfred.* Beneath whose banner shot you arrow last?

*Arthur and Oswald.* The king's.

*Alfred.* And take you aim at the king's liege?—

As well the king himself!—What! do you stand  
 With grasped weapons still?—or do you look  
 For signal here? Old soldier, why is this?—  
 Is't thus you use your battle-temper'd sword?  
 Is that the rust of Danish blood upon't?  
 These hacks—are they the thrusts of Danish blades?  
 Ne'er hath it met the foe withstood it yet?  
 Nor hath it fail'd the friend that call'd on it?  
 Still did it guard thy country while it could?  
 Yet would it back thy king, did he command?—  
 And would'st thou tarnish it?—

*[Kenrick hangs his head.]*

The field!—the field!—  
 You drew it last in!—Ha!—You start at that!  
 Remember you who won that field?—I see  
 You do!—His shout is in thine ear!—Thine eye  
 Beholds him scattering carnage thro' the ranks  
 Of them that fled!—The Saxon then was down!  
 What!—tighten you your grasp till with the strain  
 Your weapon trembles?—Keep it to requite  
 The Dane, and put it up!

*[Kenrick sheathes his sword.—Arthur and Oswald  
 unbend their bows.—The rest follow the ex-  
 ample.]*

*Egbert. (Aside.)* What man is this  
 That lacks all sign and title of command,  
 Yet all obey?

*Edwy.* We're friends again.

*Kenrick.* Content.

*Egbert.* A cup, then, to our making up.—Sit down—  
 A pledge for concord, friends,—the health of him  
 Whose banner is our country's sun, that shall  
 Disperse the night which overclouds her now—  
 “Alfred!”—I pray you, Edwy, sing those rhymes  
 You've strung for us, and we so love to hear.

*Edwy.* Right willingly; tho' homely be the verse  
I dare be sworn was ne'er more rich in heart.

*Edwy sings.*

When circling round the festive board  
The cup is fill'd the highest,  
And one and all their love record  
For him their thoughts then nighest—  
Who owns the name their lips pronounce,  
While vouching tear-drops spring, Sirs,  
In eyes he does not see?—At once  
I'll tell you—here's—"THE KING," Sirs!

When proud in arms the nation stood  
To front the foul invader,  
And England did what England could,  
And fate alone betray'd her—  
Who was the foremost to advance,  
The first a spear to fling, Sirs,  
The last to quit the field?—At once  
I'll tell you—here's—"THE KING," Sirs!

And now when o'er the prostrate land  
The spoiler roams resistless,  
And vengeance fears to lift her brand,  
And hope almost is listless,  
Whence does the beam of solace glance,  
The song of heart'ning ring, Sirs,  
And promise freedom yet?—At once  
I'll tell you—here's—"THE KING," Sirs!

*Egbert.* Well sung.

*Edwy.* What's well intended, scarce comes short  
Howe'er performance halts—I did my best.

*Alfred.* Let them build palaces for kings no more—  
They only hide them from their proper state—  
The loves that serves them for themselves alone!  
Who'd thank a smile to walk their ample halls?



Beneath whose arched roofs with all the shows  
Of royalty, I never felt myself  
So much a king as those bare rafters see  
Me now!

*Egbert. (Observing Alfred.)* What moves him thus?—

His eyes o'erflow,  
While our's are only moist.—Nor are they tears  
The heart doth grudge to shed.—His air—his form—  
His looks—converse with me of things I've known,  
Yet have forgotten where, nor can command  
My memory to name.—Who can he be!

*Enter MAUDE, with several cakes ready for toasting.*

*Maude.* If weary hands a thrifty housewife make,  
Thou'rt thrifty, Maude, enough!—But tho' thou drop  
Thou still must drudge!—From work to work's thy rest.

*[She sets down the cakes upon the hearth, occasionally looking at Alfred as she speaks.]*

Now wer't a civil thing—ay, and a kind,  
Would any body say “Ne'er heed, good Maude,  
Leave me to toast the cakes.” But Maude may toast  
The cakes herself; for twenty turns she does  
If one is done for her, she's lucky Maude!  
I vow were never better barley cakes  
Set down before a fire!—'Twere pity they  
Should burn—and burn they may for any help  
That Maude is like to get!—She made the cakes—  
She kneaded them until her hands did ache—  
And why not toast them too?—He heeds me not;  
The cakes and I may burn, I wot, for him!—  
But he shall toast them tho'.—I wonder, friend,  
If you could make a shift to toast a cake?

*Alfred.* I do not know, fair hostess, but I'll try.

*Maude.* That's kindly spoken now; and so you shall!  
In sooth, not every body 'tis that Maude  
Would trust to toast her cakes!

*Alfred.* I'll do my best  
To prove myself deserving of the trust.

*Maude.* And if you do, I'll say you are a man!

[*Exit.*

*Edwy.* Come, comrades, be not niggards of the strain,  
But while our cheer's preparing let us troll  
A song to cheerfulness.

## SONG.

Prithee, what is happiness?  
What is always sure to bless!  
Does it come of high estate,  
Or on riches does it wait?  
Riches—rank—not always bless—  
They can ne'er be happiness!

Smiles on lofty cheek see you?  
So do I on humble too.  
Rich man's eyes, say you, are bright?  
I've seen sparkling o'er a mite!  
What's the thing doth always bless?  
That alone is happiness!

He's the man with happiness,  
Who's resolv'd himself to bless;  
If he hath a scanty cup  
Pours in smiles to fill it up—  
Seeks not more, nor pines at less—  
'Tis content is happiness!

*Alfred.* (*Rising and coming forward.*) True; happiness  
may lodge at small expense—  
To pass beneath its lintel, bow the head;  
Go with a simple suit, nor that o'er rich;  
Dine on a crust, and its own pallet spread.  
Yea, and to purchase these, ply day by day  
Its calling—profitable labour, which

It turneth into pleasure with the song  
 It still sings over it.—Such happiness  
 Is not for kings, whose privilege it is  
 To deal where others take; and greatest state  
 The last to help themselves!

[*Maude enters, and taking up the cakes, which  
 Alfred has allowed to burn, holds them before  
 him.*

*Maude.* Is this your care?  
 Knew you not e'er that meal doth come of corn?  
 Which is not grown until the earth be plough'd,  
 Which is not garner'd up until 'tis cut,  
 Which is not fit for use until 'tis ground,  
 Nor used then 'till kneaded into bread;  
 Ne'er knew you this?—It seems you never did,  
 Else had you known the value of the bread,  
 Thought of the ploughman's toil, the reaper's sweat,  
 The miller's labour, and the housewife's thrift,  
 And not have left my barley cakes to burn  
 To very cinders!

*Alfred.* I forgot, good dame.

*Maude.* Forgot!—forgot, forsooth?—You ne'er forgot  
 To eat my barley cakes!

[*Enter Edwin, confused.*

CONRAD, (*entering hurriedly.*)

The king!—the king!

*Egbert.* The king!—Rise—rise, my friends!—Rise  
 every one!

But one man here may sit.—We have mistaken  
 A palace for a cottage!—There's a head  
 Beneath this roof, the crest of whose estate  
 O'ertoppeth loftiest dome!—Knees, gentlemen!  
 Behold your king!

[*All kneel but Maude, who stands petrified.*

ODDUNE, *rushing in, followed by other Chiefs.*

Where—where's the hope of England?

*Conrad.* There!—There!

*Oddune.* My liege, the banner of the Dane—  
Thus ever lie his boast! [*Laying it at Alfred's feet.*]

*Alfred.* My faithful Earl  
Of Devon!—Rise!—Rise, gentlemen!—My lord,  
Whence came you?

*Oddune.* From my castle, which the Dane  
Beset, a numerous band, commanded by  
Hinguar and Hubba, brothers, by whose sister  
Was wrought that standard, call'd their fatal Rafen,  
Whose ominous device, they feign'd, upon  
The eve of victory was ever sure  
To flap its frowning wings.—It seem'd, indeed,  
As if death rode upon them, marking us  
His prey:—for famine plied us worse within  
Than e'en the foe without.—But 'twas a friend  
Did goad us to our good.—Despairing succour,  
And all 'munition gone; at night we made  
A sally, full resolv'd to cut our way  
Thro' the enemy, or perish sword in hand!  
The Dane was unprepar'd—before our march  
Startled his ear, our swords were at his breast!—  
Your majesty may guess, the weapons in  
Despair we drew, we wielded now in hope;  
And not content with barely making good  
Retreat, fought on for victory.—My liege,  
What we fought for we won!

*Alfred.* A fair exploit.

*Oddune.* Of fairer yet, the news of our success,  
My liege, gives hope.—Such numbers throng'd to us  
Upon our march, the handful that I thought  
To greet you with, hath swell'd into a host—  
Brave volunteers, whose pay's the leave to serve.

Under the greenwood shade they now await  
 The presence of their king, a company  
 'Twill feast your heart to see!

*[At this Egbert and his party go out.]*

*Alfred.* We'll wait upon them.

But see, our hostess all confounded seems!

*Edwin.* Kneel, dame!

*Alfred.* Nay, kneel who will, Maude shall not kneel!  
 What!—Is't my gentle hostess!—Is it she!—  
 The queen of housewives!—the kind-hearted Maude!  
 That lodg'd me—gave me share of roof and board  
 And knew not 'twas the king!—Yea, bore with me  
 In all my moods, nor gave me angry word  
 Till I with her broke faith, and burnt her cakes  
 I ne'er was grudg'd to eat!

*Edwin.* Hast thou a tongue?

Speak, Maude!

*Maude.* I will, and to thy heart's content!  
 Thou knave!—thou sorry, most disloyal knave—  
 That hoardest secrets from thy wife; and poor  
 And simple, altho' honest, woman, as  
 She is, dost pass thy king upon her for  
 A clown, a lout, a churl, no better than  
 Thyself!—Have I been five and thirty years  
 Thy drudging, patient, loving wife for this?  
 Have I so?—to be cozen'd thus, and made  
 The wink of every eye?—That ever I  
 Should be the wife—the faithful trusting wife  
 Of such a cheating, lying, shallow knave!

*[Maude throws the cakes at Edwin; then catching  
 the eye of the king, stands confounded for a  
 moment.]*

God bless your majesty!

*[Rushes out in a passion of tears.]*

*Alfred.* *(To himself.)* Now, could we learn  
 The state and numbers of the enemy,

A blow might soon be struck.

*Conrad.* Your promise, sir!

*Oddune.* Anon, good friend. You see he's deep in thought.

*Bertha.* (To *Elswith.*) Bear up! Bear up! If what you wish you'd win,

Play for it with good heart, and 'twill be your's!

*Elswith.* In sooth, for very eagerness to win,

I fear to lose.—I shall betray myself.

To be so near that but one little bound

Would take me to his heart!—O, when I think

How I could dart to it!—How, ere thine eye

Could twinkle, thou should'st see me sticking there!—

How slow doth seem the speed of speediest things!

The very arrow lags in heaving of

The twang that bids it fly.—But we must play

The housewife with our happiness, to make't

More lasting.

*Alfred.* Oddune, wonder not although

You've found your king to lose him for a time.

This list of trusty peers, with whom, thro' means

I need not name to thee, I have kept up

Intelligence, will show thee whom to warn

Of thy success; them summon to repair

To Selwood forest—there I'll give them meeting.

Among thy followers can'st find me one

Is such a master of the strain, he can

Keep time to minstrels' hand?

*Oddune.* This boy, my liege,

Is even such a one, or I o'er-rate

His skill, that when our march had weariest grown,

Still fed our freshness with his varied song,

Which seemed to know no end.—His brother there

Is suitor for the office of your page,

Which half I promis'd for their guidance, that

Thus soon hath brought us to your highness' feet.

H

*Alfred.* I take him at your word.

*[Elswith rushes up to Alfred, and snatching his hand vehemently kisses it.]*

Ha, boy!—How near  
Thy lip's thy heart?—Thou'rt over-quick, methinks,  
In proffering service.—Who doth largely promise  
With best intent goes over-nigh to make  
A beggar of performance. *(She retreats.)* Nay, I'll  
not check thee.

Love is so rich a thing, there's value in  
The only show on't.—There's my hand again.  
What! Dropp'st thou tears upon't!—He can't be base  
That's lord of gems like these!

*[Elswith, unable to conceal her feelings, rushes out,  
followed by Bertha and Conrad.]*

How? What!

*Oddune.* The boy's

A very child of nature.—He doth talk  
Her language only.—Bid him speak by words,  
At once he's silent.

*Alfred.* Silence hath a tongue,  
Altho' the ear could never find it out,  
Doth beggar that of most excelling sound.  
My lord, I'll follow you and greet our friends.

*[Exit Oddune.]*

I'll see the Dane myself!—There is a place  
In the glen where of its shaggy vesture scant  
Its sides stand bare, and there huge ribs expose  
Of solid rock; so giddy steep withal  
That down direct from the precipitous verge  
You many fathoms look.—There have I marked  
A lonely wight at the bottom couch'd, with harp  
Playing to the idle echoes by the hour,  
Admiring how they mock'd him.—I will use  
That harp! will use it to expel the foe  
Hath thrust its master from the shining hall

**A TRAGEDY.**

**59**

To the dim cavern-cell; spill'd for him his  
Heap'd dish, and cup from all sides running o'er,  
And cast him with that golden song of his  
To roots and water.—England, fail me not!  
Stand by the king that lives alone for you. *[Exit.]*

**END OF THE THIRD ACT.**



ACT IV.

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SCENE FIRST.

---

*THE DANISH CAMP.*

---

*Enter HALDANE and AMUND.**Haldane.* What, Edric wed the maid?*Amund.* E'en so, good Haldane.  
The fair reward of his desertion foul.  
The service he has done the Danish cause—  
The booty he has won and prisoners taken—  
Acquainted with each hold throughout the land—  
Has so engag'd the favour of our chief,  
Precipitate he bids the Saxon ask  
A boon, which, ere the naming, by an oath  
He binds himself to grant.*Haldane.* And Edric asks  
His daughter?*Amund.* Yes; and Guthrum can't retract.*Haldane.* The maid, I doubt, prefers his countryman,  
The noble Oswith.—Strange her father's eyes  
Perceive not that, which is the daily theme  
Of comment in the camp. Knows Ina this?

*Amund.* Not yet. 'Tis scarce a minute since our chief  
His promise gave.

*Haldane.* Say Ina should resist,  
Will Guthrum force the maid?

*Amund.* 'Tis hard to say,  
Where strong affection with strong duty strives,  
Which way the struggle's like to end.

[*The sound of a harp is heard.*

What's that?

*Haldane.* A harp.—Methought I heard the sound  
before,

But at such distance 'twas, I did suspect  
It was a trick of fancy.—Do you love  
A strain?

*Amund.* Right well.

*Haldane.* Have with you, then.  
'Tis near us.

[*Music again.*

[*Exeunt.*

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SCENE SECOND.

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A SEQUESTERED RURAL SPOT NEAR THE  
CAMP.

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*Enter INA, (leading ETHELRED,) EDITH, and Boy.*

*Edith.* Your little charge is a fair healthful plant,  
Whose thriving looks bespeak your careful tending.  
How strong is infancy in its helplessness!  
Of all that dwelt within the hold where he

Was found, no soul, they say, was spar'd but him,  
Howe'er they pray'd for mercy!

*Ina.* Silence was  
His innocent tongue, resistless!

*Edith.* Think you 'tis  
The son of the English king?

*Ina.* Most like.—You know  
His castle 'twas wherein they found the child.  
Go on before, and take him to my tent—  
We'll follow you; and mind you spare no pains  
To humour him. (*To Boy, who exits with Etheled.*) I  
know not wherefore I

Should love thee, boy: thy race is Ina's bane!

*Edith.* Why say'st thou so? The Saxon loves thee,  
*Ina.*

What though his passion is not on his tongue,  
His heart is full on't.—It doth speak in sighs—  
Love's proper words. Ne'er plainer spoke to ear.

*Ina.* Nay, tell me not.—His heart is stone to me!  
He sighs! but 'tis for freedom!

*Edith.* 'Tis for you!  
How love is blind to what it pines to see!  
You think him stone; so, like, he thinketh you.  
Look at thyself; at once thou seest him!  
Your eyes, at parting, that strain after him,  
When present, feast on any other thing;  
Your tongue that, when he hears not, rings of him,  
In's hearing's noteless, as it ne'er knew sound.  
For too strong love, his love's accounted none.

*Ina.* I tell thee, no! His thoughts abide not here.  
They're with his countrymen, some daughter fair  
Of whom he loves—not Ina.—Be it so!  
The cheek I love shall smile, tho' not on me;—  
The bird I'd keep with me I will let go  
'Plaining the bondage that would kill't with doating—  
He's free—my father gives him liberty.

## A TRAGEDY.

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*Edith.* And what for thee?

*Ina.* To die like a poor flower  
That lives while it doth gaze upon the sun,  
But from her radiant lord too long shut out  
By the cold cloud, anon doth hang her head,  
And die a smiling death!

*Edith.* He comes.

*Ina.* Alas!  
For the last time.

OSWITH, (*entering, perceiving INA.*)

*SW.* Still, still my treacherous steps  
Betray me, leading me to what I'd shun,  
Yet what is ever present to my thought!  
Why fears my eye to see—my thralldom's full—  
If 'tis enchantment, better to enjoy  
The fatal sweetness of the spell in vain  
I strive to break!

*Ina.* What, Saxon, is the wish  
Lies nearest to thy heart?

*Oswith.* The wish should lie  
The farthest from it!

*Ina.* 'Tis well answered.—Could  
The captive wean his thoughts from liberty,  
He might enjoy his cell.—You wish for freedom?

*Oswith.* And if I do, I wish for that, howe'er  
Enriching others, only beggars me.

*Ina.* What! would'st thou not be free?

*Oswith.* I would, as one  
That feasts upon his bane, and knows it—wishes  
To fly't, yet cannot tear himself away;  
Yea, loathes the hand, howe'er so loving, that  
Would force him from't!

*Ina.* What call'st thou thy bane?

*Oswith.* What earth with all its other richest things

Can't sum the richness of!—What the fair heavens  
 Themselves call fair—so earthly—heavenly fair,  
 That not to love's to gainsay heaven and earth,  
 And loving is to lose them!

*Ina.* Lose them not;  
 But fly thy bane. Thou'rt free. 'Tis Guthrum's will.  
 What! fly'st thou not?

*Oswith.* Why didst thou give me life,  
 To take't away again? I did not ask  
 For freedom;—thralldom was more kind to me,  
 That held me unto that I ought to fly,  
 But fain would cling to.—Honour scarce did swerve  
 That was constrain'd to look where 'twas forbid.  
 And if it look'd till it forgot itself,  
 'Twas its mischance—not crime.—Now, if it falls,  
 It falls of its own will!—Oh, maid, too fair!  
 Help me to 'scape the ruin thou hast wrought!  
 Think—think—'tis an apostate kneels to thee!  
 Instruct thy melting eye to flash with scorn—  
 Teach thy sweet tongue harsh indignation's note—  
 Erect thy form with stern severity—

*Enter EDRIC, (unperceived.)*

Till, like a seraph, darker in thy frown  
 For what thou look'st and breath'st of beauteous heaven,  
 Thou aw'st me into virtue!

*Edric.* Drop that hand!  
 'Tis mine!

*Oswith.* Thine!—Ha! what subtle fire is this,  
 That with the light'ning's speed darts thro' me, and  
 feels

As all consuming!—Thine!

*Ina.* Believe him not.—  
*Oswith,* believe him not.—Believe the maid  
 With thought of thee doth all forget herself—  
 Casts off the bashful 'tire of virginhood,

And, unenforced, stands confest thine own !—  
 The eyes turns on thee, she would still avert,  
 And lets thee see them tho' they stream with love—  
 Calls on thee with the tongue that ne'er till now  
 Betray'd her secret, to receive't for thine !  
 Believe him not—he sports with thee.—Thy heart  
 Is not more surely seated in thy breast,  
 Than is thy image lodg'd within my heart—  
 Not more the spring of life to thee than that  
 Is life itself to Ina ! 'Fore the world  
 I do proclaim me thine, and cleave to thee !  
 But plight me faith for faith.

*Oswith.* I do, sweet maid !

*Edric.* (*Drawing his sword and rushing between them.*) My  
 life's a bar which thou must first remove !

*Oswith.* (*Drawing.*) 'Twixt me and life ! Strong love  
 doth find me weak

As a poor straw upon a torrent's breast,  
 And bears as fierce away.

*Guthrum.* (*Entering.*) Hold !—Stop !—Who stirs  
 There's but a single step 'twixt him and death,  
 And he has trod it.—What's your cause of quarrel?  
 Ina, my child !—What share hast thou in't? What !  
 Dost turn from me ? [*Angrily.*

*Ina.* My father !

*Guthrum.* There !—there !—there !

[*Pressing her to him.*

Did I speak loud to thee !—Poor silly fawn,  
 To startle at a sound !—Art thou in tears?  
 It does concern thee, then?—How, Ina, speak !  
 Dost hear me?—Answer, or I'll think—I'll think  
 You would if you could !—No matter ! Noble Edric,  
 Explain the meaning of this quarrel to  
 Thy friend.

*Ina.* Call not thyself his friend !

*Guthrum.* My Ina, but I must ! and so must thou—

His bosom friend.—I'm pledg'd to it.—Thy hand  
Is his!

*Ina.* Without my heart?—What, father, what!  
Without my heart?—The one did never go  
Without the other yet!—Where my hand went  
In duty or in love, my heart went too!  
They never were but one. (*Kneels.*) And will you give  
My hand without my heart?—And if you will,  
And Ina must consent, her heart must break,  
And give you life and all along with it!—  
Oh! wed me not to one I cannot love!

*Guthrum.* Whom lov'st thou, then?—Who has lit up  
this fire

Whose flame goes in and out upon thy cheek,  
And by its fitful durance shows so deep  
And thorough kindling?

*Ina.* Thou, my father, thou  
That did'st instruct me in the features of  
Each manly grace, till I, alas! too apt,  
Made profit of the lessons that you gave,  
To shape myself an idol out of all  
Things rare and rich in manly favour, made  
For my young heart to keep and worship, till  
There wanted but the vouching of my eyes  
To say the thing was real!—If there's a blush  
Upon my cheek, shame on it, it belies  
My soul, which owns no honest cause of shame.  
They saw and vouch'd—they saw and vouch'd it—there!

*Guthrum.* What's this to me?

*Ina.* The being of thy child—  
Thy Ina—thy dear Ina—who forgets  
Her father 'tis she's kneeling to, as tho'  
He were a stranger to her, but now leaps  
Into his bosom!—Oh, I'd like to see  
The harm could reach me here!

*Guthrum.* Thou art my child!

I thought thy heart was still thine own !—my Ina,—  
 There, loose thine arms, and take them from about  
 My neck, and leave me to myself a while.—  
 What ! give her to an enemy !—Alas !  
 Her life feeds on him.—He's the nobler nature.  
 Guthrum could love him tho' he spurn'd his friendship !  
 Yet might he not by such a gift be won.  
 Without condition wed her to him, if  
 His arm can win her ?—Yes, it shall be so !  
 A generous nature, for a benefit  
 The donor nameth not return for, oft  
 In o'erheap'd measure pays. (*Aside.*) Now hear me, all.  
 Irrevocable thus my sentence stands :  
 By my consent doth Edric wed the maid ;  
 By her consent her hand is Oswith's right ;  
 Ina's no longer mine, nor yet her own  
 To give. Who else can claim her, take her !

[*Oswith and Edric unsheath their swords, Ina swoons.*

Ay, you are apt I see, and catch at once  
 My meaning. Up—away—decide while yet  
 Lapsed perception spares her the suspense  
 Of your debate. (*Exit Oswith and Edric.*) My heart's  
 with Oswith.—Ha !  
 How keen their strife !—That death should deal such  
 blows  
 About the tender head of life, and throw  
 Them all away !—Who's that is down ?—'Tis Oswith.  
 Nay, he is up again, as quick as point  
 Of temper'd blade you force to kiss the hilt  
 Springs back into its place again.—Well fought !—  
 Well fought !—He shows his joints are not acquaintance  
 With such remissness.—Edric is disarm'd,  
 And Oswith wins the maid ! There, Saxon, she  
 Is thine ! (*Throws Ina, who has just recovered, into the*  
*arms of Oswith as he enters.*) Attend us to the  
 banquet, we



Prepared to greet another guest.—I'll load him  
With favours till they bend him to my will. [*Aside.*

[*Exit Guthrum.*

*Ina.* Thou'rt safe!—And dost thou turn away?—  
Alas!

Can he be said to win who pines his gain?  
Is that a prize the winner doubts to take?

[*Disengages herself.*

*Oswith.* O say not doubts! or if I doubt, believe  
My doubt disparages the winner, not  
The prize!—a gem the regal circlet might  
Aspire to seat, who would not grudge to see  
Go deck the bonnet of the base, 'mongst whom  
He were the basest that could wear't with pride!  
Thou peerless gem! the brow that may be proud  
To call itself of thy pure lustre lord,  
Should bear itself as lofty to the eye  
As it were honour's own. Prove such is mine,  
I'll show thee how I'll wear thee!—As I am,  
I match thee not, and wear thee doubtingly!

[*Exeunt Oswith and Ina, followed by Edith.*

### SCENE THIRD.

#### GUTHRUM'S TENT.

*GUTHRUM and his Chiefs, &c. seated at a banquet.*

*Guthrum.* Fall to—fall to!—the feast has but the  
name  
Of one, that's not partaken heartily.

The riches of the board are not the fare  
We spread upon it, but the relish it  
Is tasted with.—Fall to, I say, and show  
Your covers are not unworthy of you, using  
The service which they proffer.

HALDANE, (*entering.*)

Mighty chief,  
A Saxon minstrel have we hither brought,  
Whose joyous art all day hath cheer'd the camp.  
The string he touches with a master hand;  
And while he plays, a boy that waits upon him  
Sings to his harp rare tales of love and war  
As ever ear did listen.

*Guthrum.* Bring him in.  
Was never feast so rich it might not be  
Indebted to a strain.

*Enter ALFRED, conducted by HALDANE, and followed by  
BERTHA.—Struck by the majesty of his deportment, the  
Danes, one after another, stand up, all but Guthrum,  
who does not immediately see him.*

Why rise you, friends?—  
Ha!—Who art thou, whose lofty bearing mocks  
Thy lowly guise, despite of which thou stand'st  
Amidst the high and valiant, sole observ'd  
The mark by all deferr'd to?

*Alfred.* I'm the bard.

*Guthrum.* And what's the bard?

*Alfred.* The son of phantasy,  
Whose world's o' the air, to mortal vision else  
Impalpable—a paragon to this—  
Where he communes with forms whose radiancy  
Doth mock the lustre of earth's fairest things.  
Your only lord of spells, who, as he wills,  
Entranceth hearts, the which he sways to thrill

With extacy of pleasure, or of pain!  
 Whose title, from above, earth can't confer  
 Or take away!—Whose smile is coveted  
 By beauty—valour—their bright mirror, where  
 They see themselves more bright! Whose tributaries  
 Are kings themselves! Their gorgeousness but serves  
 To swell his strain, that doth emblazon them  
 Beyond their state or titles!

*Guthrum.* Well replied.

I like thy answer better that 'tis bold.  
 Sit down, sit down. (*To Chiefs.*)—A sample of your skill.  
 Thou spok'st of beauty now,—what canst thou say  
 In praise of it?

*Alfred.* (*To himself.*) Thanks to the tender hand  
 That guided me to con the minstrel's lore,  
 And treasure't in my heart!

*Guthrum.* Let's taste thy skill.

*Alfred.*

Wouldst thou know what beauty is?  
 Beauty is the queen of sighs!  
 Not a heart but owneth this:  
 Proud or humble, light or wise!  
 Crowned goblets some desire;  
 Some to see the banquet spread:  
 Some prize shining gold; and higher  
 Value some, a shining deed;—  
 Safety's deemed a gem by some;  
 Danger some a jewel call;  
 Some to power desire to come;  
 But beauty is the priz'd of all!—  
 Well the bard her praise may sing;  
 Of his soul-commanding lyre,  
 Beauty is the mistress string  
 Which doth lend it all its fire!  
 Wanting which he could not sing—  
 Rhymeless, numberless might be,  
 Nor e'er had won a name for deathless minstrelsy!

*Guthrum.* Right well thou prov'st thy title to thy name!

Bear him a goblet—let it overflow,  
Rather than stint its welcome of the lip  
That pours us out the strain.

*Alfred.* (*Aside to Bertha.*) Thy brother, boy!  
How is it that I miss him?

*Bertha.* In the throng  
He darted sudden from my side, and vanish'd,  
Ere I could utter a word to stay him!

*Alfred.* Ha!  
Would he betray me, think you?

*Bertha.* Nay; my life  
Upon his faith!

*Alfred.* Mine hangs upon it, so  
We must not tarry here.

*Guthrum.* Come, strike thy harp.  
We'd hear a strain, and prythee let it be  
A warlike one. Come, give us something to  
The honour of the Dane!

*Alfred.* The bard's accurs'd  
That sings his country's shame!—I've sung her praise;  
My harp hath rung and rung with it; and did  
I think that theme was done, I would not care  
The strings my fingers many a year have kiss'd  
To tear from their sweet frame, tho', as they snapp'd,  
My heart-strings broke, and I should share the ruin!

*Guthrum.* Well, what you please. What strain wilt  
play to us?

*Alfred.* The downfall of Cadwallon.

*Guthrum.* What was he?

*Alfred.* The Saxon's foe. Ar't ready, boy? Begin!

*Alfred plays, while Bertha sings.*

Cry—cry to the eagle, her feast is prepar'd;  
Cadwallon the Lion, his falchion has bar'd!

Ten thousand spears start at his trumpet's song,  
 And his march in thunder rolls along!  
 Does she hear?—Will she come?—Is she hurrying down?  
 All's ready, and waiting for her alone!—  
     But the might's with the right,  
     From the cloud breaks the light;  
 And the high head at morning—may lie low ere the night!

But why does the Saxon Oswald kneel?  
 Is't for his prayers he is dress'd in steel?  
 And wherefore kneel his Saxon bands?  
 Do they pray with their weapons in their hands?  
 Or are they contented to banquet the guest  
 Cadwallon the Lion has call'd to his feast?  
     But the might's with the right,  
     From the cloud breaks the light;  
 And the high head at morning—may lie low ere the night!

Not long did the Saxon kneel—he arose  
 With a shout that made leap the bold hearts of his foes!  
 And on he rush'd, and down he bore  
 The spears that hunted him before.  
 And the trumpet that sounded the first for the field—  
 Cadwallon the Lion's—was the first that was still'd!  
     For the might's with the right,  
     From the cloud breaks the light;  
 And the high head at morning—may lie low ere the night!

But where is the eagle, was call'd to the feast?  
 She is come! but Cadwallon salutes not his guest!  
 She has fall'n to her meal without beckon or word;  
 She screams with her glee, but her mirth is unheard!  
 She has perch'd on the head of the warrior's son,  
 And Cadwallon's as mute as he did not look on!  
     For the might's with the right,  
     From the cloud breaks the light;  
 And the high head at morning—lies low ere the night!

*Guthrum.* Well done! A strain that for a warrior's ear!

For me, thrice precious is the ruby drop  
Since the enchanting strain has breath'd upon it!  
Taste, friends; come, lips to brims! there's magic in  
The cup! The health of him that pour it in—  
"The bard"—the king of song—whose praise to sound  
Becomes and not disparages the lips.  
Of kings themselves!

*Alfred.* (*Aside.*) A regal nature his!  
There's something in thee, Guthrum, I could claim  
Close kindred with; but there's no grasping hands  
For thee and me, save in the deadly strife  
That ends the hope of one of us! I've gain'd  
All needful knowledge. Ward of caution none  
They keep—in our complete discomfiture  
Secure. An easy prey they're sure to fall  
To sudden onset from a band not half  
Their strength.—Come, boy!

*Bertha.* My brother!

*Alfred.* He must needs  
Abide the danger he has rashly woo'd!  
Altho' to leave him be to forfeit that  
My heart, I know not wherefore, cleaveth to,  
As of its richest treasures lost 'twere part,  
And not the least, that it had found again!

*Bertha.* And must we leave him in their hands?

*Alfred.* We must.

*Bertha.* Thou know'st not whom we leave!

*Alfred.* What mean you, boy?

*Bertha.* Leave not the camp without him. Losing him,  
Life, fortune, crown, and kingdom—such renown  
As were the gilding of all fame'gone by—  
Thou wilt account but loss—so heavy loss  
As nothing can retrieve!

*Alfred.* What words are these,

That out of phantoms seem to conjure things  
 Substantial;—give to wild imaginings,  
 Unreal as the pageant of a dream,  
 Retentive being—form as palpable  
 As ever met the scrutiny of the keen  
 And searching day? Boy, thou dost make me cold,  
 With such expectance as almost with fate  
 Confronteth hope: and it is nothing short  
 Of phrenzy to believe!—Who is thy brother?

*AMUND, (entering hurriedly.)*

Great Guthrum!

*Guthrum.* Ha! speak on. Thy errand's sure  
 Of wonder's documenting, or ne'er yet  
 Saw I her messenger!

*Amund.* The child they sav'd  
 When they surpris'd and sack'd the castle of  
 The English king—its mother have we found  
 Within the very camp, her sex disguised,  
 Seeking, no doubt, her child—at sight of which,  
 Impetuous nature, pushing caution by,  
 Burst forth with clamour wild, betraying her!

*Guthrum.* If, as we think, that child's of royal birth,  
 His mother is the queen.—It is the queen  
 You've found!—Conduct her hither, Amund.

*Amund.* She  
 Ere this had stood before you, but she prayed  
 Time to assume her sex's habit first,  
 Which, at fair Ina's instance, readily  
 We granted. You shall presently behold her.

*Guthrum.* Pay her all honour! [*Exit Amund.*]

*Alfred. (Aside to Bertha.)* Boy—where am I, boy?

*Bertha.* In Guthrum's tent, my lord.

*Alfred.* In Guthrum's tent!

Art thou a real thing that tell'st me so?

Am I indeed in Guthrum's tent? Is that  
Guthrum himself, and not a counterfeit?  
Are these, in honest verity, his chiefs?  
Is't not a phantasm all? What's passing here?

*Bertha.* They've found thy queen, and she has found  
thy child!

*Alfred.* My queen and child are dead!—No?

*Bertha.* No, my lord!

*Alfred.* No?

*Bertha.* No.

*Alfred.* How should they be alive! Go to.  
They perish'd in my castle!

*Bertha.* No.

*Alfred.* They did.

'Tis but a dream!

*Bertha.* My lord, beware! They'll note you.

*Alfred.* 'Tis not a dream—and do I find them here!

O happiness that comest out of time!

Thou choosest ill the place to greet me in.

Thou mockest me to hold thy arms to me;

I cannot rush to their embrace.—I'm poor

With all the wealth thou callest mine again.

I dare not touch it.—It were better far

I never had been told on't!

*Enter ELSWITH, in female attire, INA, EDITH, HALDANE,  
AMUND, and Soldiers.*

*Elswith.* Where's your chief?

Which of this company is he to whom

Behoves it that a mother should prefer

Her suit, which asks possession of her child—

Her infant found—by loss grown doubly dear?

*Guthrum.* Why, where's the boy?

*Elswith.* They tore him from my arms!

Yea, from my heart that coil'd itself about him,

And they did nigh tear with him from its seat!



*Guthrum.* Bring him, and give him her.

[*Exit Soldiers and Edith.*]

*Elswith.* Thou hast a heart!—  
Thou art a parent, sure, thyself!

*Guthrum.* Why, Ina,  
Suffer'd you this?

*Ina.* My lord, 'twas Haldane's act;  
Nor would he lend to my beseeching ear.

*Guthrum.* Why, Haldane, thwarted you my child?

*Elswith.* I knew  
He was a parent!

*Haldane.* She refus'd, my lord,  
To own her state, which yet denied she not.

*Guthrum.* Haldane, 'twas not the way. A mother hath  
A claim, at thought of which the eye may drop  
Without a blush, tho' on the bristl'd cheek  
Of sternest manhood, which it is inhuman  
To use against her!—Give her child to her.

*Re-enter EDITH and Soldiers, with Child.*—*ETHELRED is  
given to ELSWITH.*

*Elswith.* Would that the father of that child could  
thank thee!

Alas!—I little thought he was so near! [*Seeing Alfred.*  
Come, come, my boy! [*Going.*

*Guthrum.* Stay, lady!—We believe  
In thee we claim a prize far richer than  
The land we've won—the mistress of that land!  
Minstrel, you say you've sat in Alfred's hall.  
You know his queen, then;—look.—Is this the queen?

*Alfred.* It is.

*Guthrum.* Thou can'st not blame me, lady: wrong  
I would not do thee: but it is my foe  
Of whom thou consort art,—that foe—his queen  
And child my thralls—is now within my power!

*Elswith.* Might he not ransom them?

*Guthrum.* He might.

*Elswith.* He will!

Oh, name the ransom thou wilt take!

*Guthrum.* His crown.

*Elswith.* His crown!

*Guthrum.* Why, what is that?—His kingdom's gone.

*Elswith.* I think he would not ransom them with that.

*Alfred.* He would not!

*Guthrum.* Why?

*Alfred.* He wears it for his people!

The day he put it on, he call'd himself

Of them the father—to their parent land

It wedded him—his proper consort she:

'Twixt him and them he knows not wife or child

He dares allow to stand.

*Guthrum.* How know'st thou?

*Alfred.* What does not know the bard

That's great or high, if he doth know himself?

His lyre's the heart—truth, honour, are the strings

He sweeps—the deeds he sings it is the pride

Of heroes and of monarchs to enact!

*Guthrum.* He hath not nature, that 'gainst nature's  
law

Would sacrifice his child.

*Alfred.* He may have more!

*Guthrum.* What?

*Alfred.* The command of nature: the sublime

Peculiar attribute of kings, who know

The import of their titles,—which doth shut

Their ears 'gainst her beseechings, when they'd thwart

The voice of duty; which around their eyes,

To any look of her's, the fillet pure

Of justice bindeth thrice; which caseth them

As 'twere in adamant, that they withstand

The singings of her fury, when in arms

Which lift them so 'bove earth, they seem as tho'  
They sat in some attendant sphere, wherefrom  
They look'd and rul'd her !

*Guthrum.* Well thou said'st  
Thy world was of the air : thou dost not talk  
Of things of earth ; thy sayings are not sooth.  
I would thy king were here to prove thee but  
A dreamer. With these jewels in his eye  
He would not see his crown ; yea tho' it shone  
Bright as it did ere I unstudded it !  
Could'st find thy king ?

*Alfred.* I could.

*Guthrum.* Go seek him, then ;  
And when thou find'st him, greet him from me thus :—  
His queen and child are in my power.—They're free  
If he will pay me homage for them : hence !  
Thou know'st the way to lead him to my feet !

*Alfred.* I take my leave.

*Guthrum.* By Odin, thou dost tower  
As tho' thou wast the king himself. Good Oswith,  
Know'st thou this man ? [*Leading him up to Alfred.*]

*Alfred.* (*Turning full upon Oswith.*) He does.

*Guthrum.* His quality ?

*Oswith.* A minstrel : if the name belongs to him  
Who cannot find his master in the land,  
'Mong all that sweep the string !

*Guthrum.* You may depart.

*Elswith.* (*Approaching Alfred.*) Minstrel, you'll bear  
my duty to your lord.

*Alfred.* Yes, lady !

*Elswith.* You'll be sure !—To mind thee on't,  
Remember I did kiss thy hand !

*Alfred.* I will.

*Elswith.* You'll tell my lord, if 'tis his will indeed,  
That we should never meet again, I'll try  
And teach my heart obedience to his will,

Tho', conning the hard lesson, it should break !  
 You'll tell him this? I kiss'd thy hand before ;  
 Remember I did kiss it once again !

*Alfred.* You'll meet your lord again.

*Guthrum.* Relate to him

'What now thou see'st and hear'st : such looks and words  
 As shake the soul of Guthrum—of his foe !  
 If he remains unconquer'd, he's not man !

*Alfred.* He is a king !

[*Exit Alfred.—Elswith, struggling with her emotions,  
 stands sometime gazing after him, and at length  
 drops senseless.—Haldane raises her.*

*Guthrum.* What means this? Is't for him !

*Elswith.* (*Recovering.*) Stop ! Alfred !

*Guthrum.* 'Tis the king !

*Elswith.* No ! No !

*Guthrum.* It is ; hence with her !

Pursue him !

*Oswith.* (*Placing himself before the tent.*) Who at-  
 tempts to pass the tent,

Dies on the spot !

*Guthrum.* It is the king ?

*Oswith.* It is !

And here I stand to die for him !

*Guthrum.* Thou traitor !

*Oswith.* Traitor no more !—And for my treason past—  
 If treason 'twas, the cause I could not save,  
 And counted hopeless, to forget for love—  
 My heart shall make atonement with its blood !

*Guthrum.* Why are you all unarmed ?—Slave !—  
 recreant !

So rich a prize !—A javelin's in the tent—  
 Search for it !

*Amund.* Here it is.

*Guthrum.* Quick, bring it me.

Thus I transfix the slave !

*Ina.* (*Rushing to Oswith and throwing her arms about him.*) Transfix me too!

*Guthrum.* What! my own blood against me!

*Amund.* Nay, my lord,  
Her arms but fetter him.

*Guthrum.* Rush on him, then!

[*Amund and others rush upon Oswith, secure him,  
and separate him from Ina.*]

Hence with him!—I devote him to the God!

It is irrevocable! I did sin

To save him from him!—I restore the victim;

Yea, tho' my child should bleed along with him!

*Ina.* Thy child shall bleed along with him!

*Guthrum.* What, Ina?—

Ha! do I see a statue or my child?

That cheek is marble by its hue!—those eyes—

The chissel makes as good for any touch

Of sense that's in them!—What is it I've done?

Oh! they have lov'd and pin'd, and lov'd again

As fresh as ever!—Take her to her couch!

She'll sleep.—Will she sleep? There,—gently!—I am  
grown

From fire to ice with looking on her. Ha!

For what have I done this? Stand you all here?

What! have I paid so dearly for the prize,

And do you let it go? Pursue!—Pursue! [*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

## ACT V.

## SCENE FIRST.

## SELWOOD FOREST.

*Enter ODDUNE and EDWY, meeting.*

*Oddune.* No sign of Alfred?

*Edwy.* None!—Our scouts have all  
Return'd, dishearten'd with their fruitless search.

*Oddune.* Where can he linger—with so fair a welcome  
Impatient waiting him, as he would meet  
From yonder gallant bands? The spirit now  
That bears its crest so high, from his delay  
To lead them on to action, will anon  
Begin to droop—perchance may quite subside!

*Edwy.* How many do we muster?

*Oddune.* By the last  
Return, six thousand men.

*Edwy.* The field shows fair!

*Oddune.* Fair cause—fair field!—Who'd e'er expect  
so soon

To see the armour burnish'd up again  
Was cast aside for good! A pity 'twere  
What shows such thrift should not be turn'd to use,

L

But, bootless, thrown away! They will not fight  
Unless the king do head them!

*Edwy.* See, my lord,  
What movement's that?

*Oddune.* Here's one will tell us.

EDWIN, (*entering.*)

*Edwin.* Be

Prepar'd, my lord. The soldiers clamour for  
The king, and doubts are spreading thro' the ranks  
You humour them—he will not come to lead them.  
Their chiefs conduct them hither, from your own lips  
Assurance to receive, and fair encouragement.

*Enter* EGBERT, KENRICK, ARTHUR, *Chiefs, and Soldiers.*

*Egbert.* Now, Kenrick, speak! say what the soldiers  
want.

*Oddune.* Well, gallant friends! is England to be  
free?

Shall we change places with our conquerors,  
Or still endure the yoke?

*Kenrick.* We want the king!  
Let him appear, we cannot meet the foe  
Too soon!

*Oddune.* As surely shall you see him, as  
You long to see the foe!

*Kenrick.* But when, my lord?  
'Tis that we'd know! When was the king the last  
Upon the field? Has he not ever on  
The eve of battle, earlier than his chiefs,  
Been out with looks of ardour heartening us—  
Our morning sun that never clouded rose—  
Enduing us with life and vigour new!  
At most we muster bare six thousand men  
To meet the Danish host!—The king among us  
Would make our numbers treble!—Show us the king!

The only waving of his plume in battle  
Were worth a hundred spears in hands as bold  
As ever brandish'd weapon !

*Oddune.* What and if  
Indeed he should not come? Ought you to feel  
Your tyrants' feet upon your necks the less?  
Your king is present in his cause !—Be that  
Your king !

*ALFRED enters, (still disguised.)*

Whoever leads you, meet the Dane !  
I speak not, friends, because I'm next in place !  
I care not for myself !—Point out my post :  
The van, the rear : I'll be content to take  
My stand beside the man of lowest note  
Among you ! Make yon minstrel without helm  
Or sword your leader. I will follow him.  
So that I fight, I care not in what rank !  
Let him can make the absence of his king  
Plea to desert his country and his king,  
Fall off !—So heaven sustain me in the cause,  
Altho' our Alfred's presence now would add  
Ten other richer lives to mine, yet say  
He should not come, this faithful sword I draw  
I will not sheathe till it has struck a blow  
For liberty !

*Egbert.* I second you, brave Oddune !

*Edwy.* And so do I !

*Oddune.* And so will every man,  
Unless there be among the people one  
That does not love his king !

*Kenrick.* No, Oddune, no !  
The people live but for their king !

*Alfred.* The king  
Lives only for his people !—Oh, my people !  
You are the drops of blood that make your king !



And do I see you once again in arms!

[*Bursts into tears.—The Chiefs and general Soldiery seem affected.*]

Oh, friends! why draw your hands across your eyes,  
If mine should be asham'd of what they do?  
We've met again, my friends!—Who is the foe  
Shall scatter us again?—Oh, England! England!  
Too fair—too richly gifted not to tempt  
The spoiler—well that thou hast sons too true  
To leave thee to his ravin! Thoul't be free  
Till thou art childless!—Think not, gallant friends,  
An hour I've squander'd that was due to you,  
And to our common country!—I have seen  
The Danish camp!—

*Oddune.* Their camp, my liege!—

*Alfred.* Have stood

In Guthrum's very presence!—That disguise  
Will tell thee how. They'd fall an easy prey  
To half our numbers! Friends! a royal stake  
I've laid upon your heads that you will win  
The day!

*Oddune.* What stake, my liege?

*Alfred.* Your prince and queen!

They're in the spoiler's power. I might indeed  
Have ransom'd them, but what he asked your king  
Could not afford to pay.

*Oddune.* What was't, my liege?

*Alfred.* My people, Oddune.

*Egbert.* In the spoiler's power

Our prince and queen!—What wait we for?

*Oddune.* For nothing

But the king's word to move upon the foe!

*Alfred.* Upon him, then! Now think you on the things  
You most do love!—Husbands and fathers on  
Their wives and children—lovers upon their mistresses—  
And all upon their country! When you use

Your weapons, think on the beseeching eyes  
 To whet them could have lent you tears for water?  
 Oh, now be men or never! From your hearths  
 Thrust the unbidden feet, that from their nooks  
 Your aged fathers drove—your wives and babes!  
 The couches your fair-handed daughters us'd  
 To spread, let not the vaunting stranger press,  
 Weary from spoiling you!—Your roofs that hear  
 The wanton riot of the intruding guest  
 That mocks their masters,—clear them for the sake  
 Of the manhood, to which all that's precious clings  
 Else perishes.—The land that bore you—oh!  
 Do honour to her!—Let her glory in  
 Your breeding;—rescue her—revenge her, or  
 Ne'er call her mother more!—Come on, my friends!  
 And where you take your stand upon the field,  
 Thence, howsoever you advance, resolve  
 A foot you'll ne'er recede, while from the tongues  
 Of womanhood and childhood, helplessness  
 Invokes you to be strong! Come on!—Come on!  
 I'll bring you to the foe!—And when you meet him,  
 Strike hard! strike fair! strike while a blow  
 Is in an arm! strike till you're free—or fall!  
 [*Exeunt Alfred and the rest.*]

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 SCENE SECOND.

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 INA'S TENT.
 

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*A recess in the centre, with a curtain drawn before it.—*

*Enter GUTHRUM, EDITH, and OSCAR.*

*Guthrum.* What say the priests?

*Oscar.* You may not spare his life!

Your oath to Odin must be kept, unless  
 His country he forswears, and serves the god—  
 Conditions which he spurns. Would else the tide  
 Of your great nation's prosperous fortune ebb  
 To an eternal drought! Among the ranks  
 They run, thy oath reiterating, and, with words  
 Ambiguous, starting fears you may retract  
 And curse your people!

*Guthrum.* Let their altar reek!  
 Blood rain upon them till it drown them!—Leave  
 The tent!

*Oscar.* Shall they prepare to sacrifice?

*Guthrum.* Tell them, if for command of mine they  
 wait,

I will not give it!—No! not for their god!

[*Exit Oscar.*]

She speaks not?

*Edith.* Nay, my lord, at times a word;  
 But none that leads to certain inference—  
 A gleam you'd think belong'd to day, but find  
 Is only of the night!

*Guthrum.* Has she not slept?

*Edith.* Naught but unnatural sleep—if sleep it is,—  
 Rest that might pass for wakefulness—that scarce  
 Doth shut the lid—which weariness itself  
 Beholding, ere 'twould taste, would watch, it seems  
 So far from sweet. All listlessness without,  
 While all within is stirring!

*Guthrum.* I'll not see her.

*Edith.* My lord?

*Guthrum.* I did not speak; or, if I did,  
 'Twas not to thee! I thought myself a father!  
 I thought as never father lov'd his child  
 I lov'd my Ina!—'Twas my pride to show it:  
 Yea, even when she rul'd me like a child!  
 I us'd to think that of my fiercest mood

She was the mistress ; from my wildest flight  
 Could call me, if my eye but lit on her,  
 As the lov'd lure the falcon !—And I've kill'd her !  
 I'm not a father !—I did never love her  
 But as a child—a toy ! It humours him  
 And he makes much of it ; he breaks it in  
 A pet, and then he weeps !—What look you at ?  
 It is not tears I'm shedding : you take stones  
 For drops of water !—Nothing half so soft  
 Can fall from Guthrum's eyes ! Come, show her to me !  
 Undraw the curtain ! He that makes a corse  
 Of what he loves, may sure be flint enough  
 To look upon't. (*Edith undraws the curtain, and Ina is  
 discovered sitting in a state of fixed abstraction.—  
 Edith raises her and leads her forward to a couch,  
 Ina moving as if it were mechanically.*) Leave us  
 to ourselves. [*Exit Edith.*]

Why, 'tis enough to make the sickly heart  
 Break out in laughter, when the very work  
 Our eyes could weep them tearless at, our hands  
 May boast the making of ! (*Approaches and sits down  
 beside her.*) My Ina !—Ina !—  
 My child ! you'll speak to me ?—What, are you ill ?  
 How feel you ?—You look well !—There, my own girl,  
 Lie in your father's bosom !—Speak to him !  
 What say'st thou, sweet ?—Was't not about to speak !  
 Thou wast.—Go on—go on !—Speak to me, Ina,  
 Or I'll go mad !—Dost hear ?—On my knees, Ina,  
 I pray you speak to me !—Now ~~this~~ is wilful !  
 Away !—You but dissemble !—'Tis put on !—  
 For shame, for shame !—You've seen my eyes in tears !  
 You've seen my knees upon the ground !—You know  
 It is your father—your old father, and  
 You'll not speak to him !—Think you he can't see ?  
 Why, any one could do't !—To fix the eye  
 And keep the visage motionless, and sit

As you were rivetted to your seat!—A child  
 Were scant of wit that lack'd such obvious power  
 Of 'simulation!—I renounce you, Ina! [Going.  
 Will you not speak to me, my child? (*Returns.*) Speak  
 to me!

A word—a whisper—any thing!—A look—a sign—  
 To show me that you are not worse than dead—  
 Alive and just the same!—I can be rash!  
 I can give way to fury!—I will try  
 If life be in thy heart! (*Draws his dagger and rushes  
 up to her.*) I'd scare a statue  
 By threatening to stab it! (*Wild discordant music is  
 heard without.—Ina starts up and clasps her hands.*)  
 Ha!

*Ina.* There 'tis!

*Guthrum.* She speaks!—She is alive!

*Ina.* I've listen'd for't

So long, I fear'd 'twould never come!

*Guthrum.* What, Ina? [Music again.

*Ina.* Again!

*Guthrum.* They do prepare to lead him forth.  
 The sacrifice will presently begin!  
 They make a pretext of their god to mock  
 My power!

*Ina.* He's ready!—Let me go to him!

*Guthrum.* To whom?—Thy lover?

*Ina.* I should like to get

My father's blessing first!

*Guthrum.* Thou hast it, Ina!

*Ina.* I know I have. Who says he does not love me?  
 I'd not believe it, tho' he were to kill me!  
 He'd do't in madness, and he'd kill himself  
 When he had found he had done it! Bless his Ina?—  
 He always blesses me—at morning when  
 He sees me first, and then, again, at night;  
 Yea, oft'times thro' the day! He'd bless me tho'

I broke his heart—and I'll bless him, altho'  
He has broken mine !

*Guthrum.* She knows me not !

*Ina.* We'll wed

As never lovers did.—We'll have our nuptials  
Of a new fashion.—Who'd be bid to them  
Let him bring tears with him, he's welcome—such  
As gush with sobs !—We'll have no smiles at them !—  
The meanest churl gets handfuls when he weds !  
Nor songs !—such minstrelsy a beggar buys  
For thanks ! But give us shrieks !—and laughter—but  
Such laughter as it withers joy to hear !—  
As breaketh from the heart of madness !—As  
Resounds from lips that wish their owners dead !

*Guthrum.* What mean those words, my child !

*Ina.* I'll wed him as

Ne'er wedded maid, to let him never from  
My side ; but dwell in such entrancement with him,  
The day for us may go without his sun,  
And night without her cloud !—All converse cease  
Of tongue or eye ! Nor shall ourselves disturb  
The silence sweet of our deep ecstasy ;  
But all be still and hush'd, as being's self  
Were swallow'd up in all absorbing love,  
And life for very bliss did turn to death !

*Guthrum.* Perception's all within—without is none.  
Passion hath drunk up sense. I feel a touch  
Of her condition while I look upon her—  
Go mad !—You had a daughter yesterday.  
Brag of her now.—Point to her cheek, and ask  
If ever grew such smiles as blossom there !  
And bid the ear that listens to her, note  
The sweetness that it feasts on ! (*Music.*) Hark !—  
thou'rt call'd !

What ! not go thro' the task thou hast begun  
So bravely ?—Slay thy child, and finish it ! [*Rushes out.*

*Ina. (Alone.)* They'd thwart a maid in her first love,  
they would?

They think it easy, but they'll find it hard!  
When first they said I should become a bride,  
Wondering how I'd deck me, I ran thro'  
The ranks of garden flowers to pick me one  
To set it in my bosom, and I remember  
It was a rose I pitched on—there's my rose!

[*Draws a dagger and returns it to her bosom. Music.*  
The rites begin.—I will steal after them,  
And watch the time.—I'm coming to thee, Oswith!  
I'll show thee how a Danish maid can love! [*Exit.*

### SCENE THIRD.

#### A WOOD.

*The statue of Odin in the centre—before it an altar prepared for sacrifice.—Enter procession of sacrifice, in the following order: Danish Chief with a body of Danish Soldiers—a body of Danish Chiefs, and AMUND, EDRIC, GUTHRUM—a body of Danish Priests—assistants with torches—Boys carrying censers—one Boy with a cushion, on which the knife of sacrifice is laid—Chief Priest of Odin—OSWITH—a body of Danish Soldiers.—The procession marches to the following chorus:—*

Prepare the faggot—light the brand—  
The victim's ready for the god!  
The knife is bare in the sacred hand,  
That on the altar pours the blood!—

Prepare—prepare—prepare—  
Great Odin's rites

The mortal who slights,

His roof shall blaze in peace—his spear shall break in war!

*Guthrum.* Saxon! thou hast of life a moment yet  
At thy command—use it for life—for love—  
For liberty!—But say the word, at once  
The weapon ready for thy blood is sheath'd,  
Unstained and harmless!

*Oswith.* I'm prepar'd to die!

*Priest.* Saxon!

*Oswith.* I come!

*Priest.* Come! bare his heart!—Odin, receive thy  
victim!

*Ina. (Rushing in.)* Oswith I wed thee thus!

*[She is on the point of plunging the dagger into  
her heart.—Oswith bursts from Priest and  
arrests her arm.]*

*Oswith.* Hold, Ina, hold!

Thou shalt not die with Oswith!

*Guthrum.* Oswith, live!

Altho' the god himself demanded him,  
He shall not die that saves my Ina's life!

*Priest.* The servants of the god protect his rights!

*Danish Soldiers. (Rushing on.)* The Saxon's in the  
camp, and down upon us!

ALFRED, (*without.*)

Press on—press on—the first that comes to blows  
Is the king's squire? Press on!

*[The Danes front the stage on which the Saxons  
are coming, who enter, headed by Alfred—  
Danes are driven off.—Alfred and Guthrum  
engage—Guthrum is disarmed.]*

*Alfred.* Brave Guthrum, live

The friend of Alfred! Serve the God he serves!



To wear a crown thou need'st not fight for one,  
 Except to keep it. Fair Northumbria  
 Receives thee for her king.—My queen and son !

*ODDUNE leads on ELSWITH and ETHELRED.*

His country's claims discharged, the king may now  
 Get leave to be a husband and a father !

*Enter OSWITH, leading INA.*

The noble Oswith !—Oswith, how you came  
 To sit at Guthrum's banquet ask I not.  
 And if I did, 'twere not o'ershrewd to guess  
 You could reply to me with fair excuse.  
 I but remember you betray'd me not,  
 And might have done it !

*Guthrum.* Nay, my liege ; you know  
 But half his loyalty.—Your quality  
 Discover'd ere you well had left the tent,  
 To stop pursuit, he risk'd not only life  
 But thriving love : and for his faith to thee,  
 Howe'er a wrong to Guthrum, thus I pay him !

*[Guthrum places Ina's hand in Oswith's.]*

*Alfred.* Guthrum, you make a beggar of his king.  
 After that gift, what gift can come with grace ?

*Enter EGBERT, and EDRIC, guarded.*

Who's he ?

*Egbert.* A traitor to our cause, my lord—  
 Whose sword has made more havoc 'mongst our people,  
 Than any ten of your foes !

*Alfred.* This victory  
 I will perpetuate by such an act  
 As shall from future kings remove the power  
 To make their public functions pander to  
 Their private gust.—Select twelve men, his peers,  
 And swearing them upon the book of God,

As they shall answer at His judgment day,  
To try their prisoner fairly. Let the charge  
Be brought before them; and as they decide,  
Be finally his innocence or guilt  
Establish'd. Hence!—Hereby shall private right,  
Which, guarded, fortifieth, more than arms,  
The conservator of the public weal,  
Be sacred even from the sceptre's touch!  
Thus to a people faithful to their king,  
A faithful king an institution gives  
That makes the lowly cottage lofty as  
The regal dome—holds justice paramount  
Of all—before her throne the peasant and  
The king himself on equal footing brings!  
A gift which you'll preserve for ever whole!—  
From which, as from your blood, pollution keep!—  
Which, if you're asked to render back, by all  
You owe yourselves, your country, and the throne,  
You'll answer, no!—which, when you'd name, you'll call

*TRIAL BY JURY!*

THE END.



1

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